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**PORTRAITS OF  
THE NINETIES**

**PORTRAITS OF THE  
SIXTIES**

**By JUSTIN MCCARTHY.**  
With portrait Illustrations.

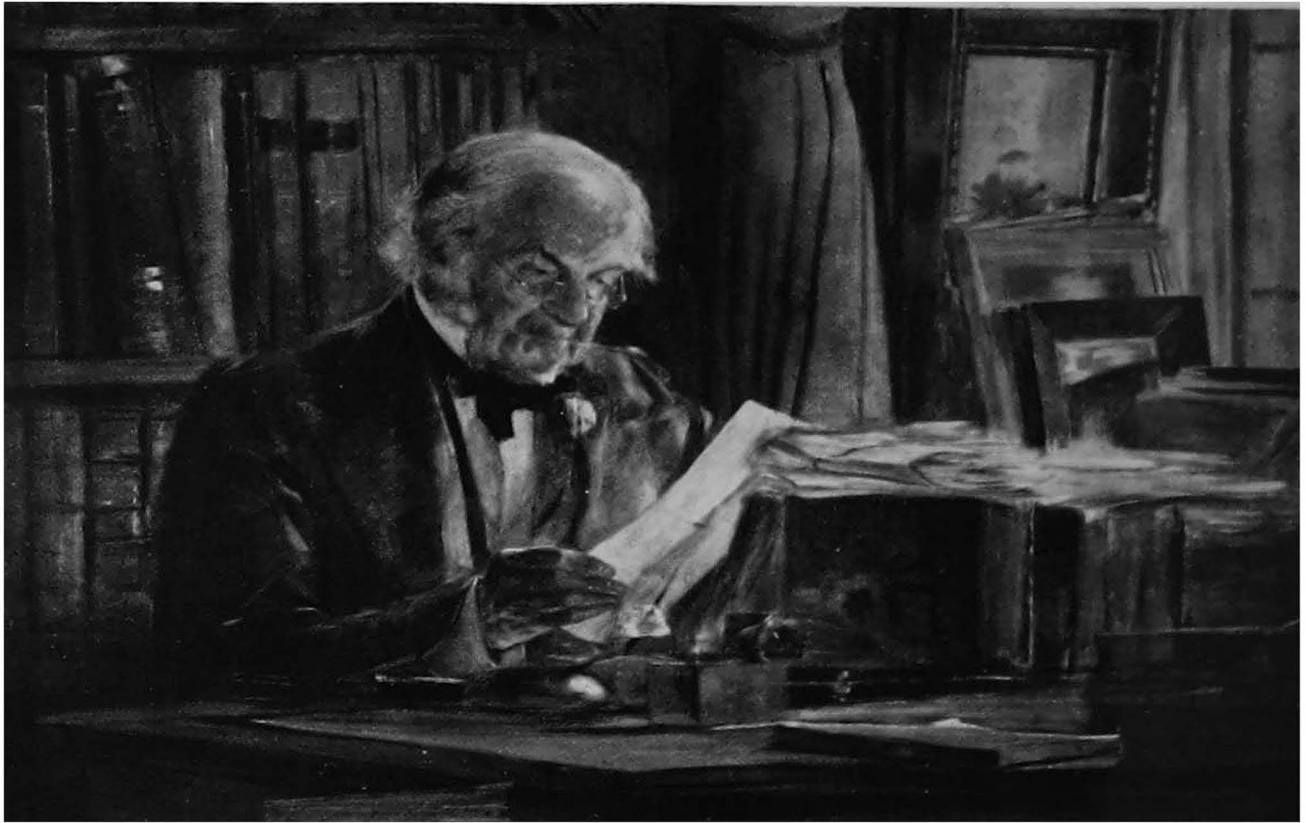
**PORTRAITS OF THE  
SEVENTIES**

**By THE RT. HON. G. W. E. RUSSELL.**  
With portrait Illustrations.

**PORTRAITS OF THE  
EIGHTIES**

**By HORACE G. HUTCHINSON.**  
With portrait Illustrations.

**T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD., LONDON.**



*(From a portrait by J. McLure Hamilton.)*

W. E. GLADSTONE.

*[Frontispiece]*

# PORTRAITS OF THE NINETIES

By

E. T. RAYMOND

WITH 20 ILLUSTRATIONS

T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.  
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# PORTRAITS OF THE NINETIES

## CHAPTER I

### THE NINETIES

**T**HE late Mr. Justin McCarthy's vivid *Portraits of the Sixties*, the late Mr. George Russell's admirable volume dealing with the men and women of the Seventies, and Mr. Horace Hutchinson's more recent *Portraits of the Eighties* form together an invaluable biographical guide to a period second in interest to none in modern history. It is the business of a less distinguished pen to attempt to give some account of leading figures during the last years of the century and of the reign of Queen Victoria.

The task is one to be approached with equal interest and trepidation. With interest, because what men thought and did in the Nineties—still more what they neglected to do and forgot to think—is still powerful to-day; what we are and suffer was in the main decided for us a quarter of a century ago. With trepidation, because the time is distant enough for the reader to demand something more than a mere essay in instantaneous photography, with its mad foreshortenings and irrelevant emphasis; while it is also near enough for errors to be exposed by competent witnesses—people who were behind the scenes at the performance, while the writer was only one of the gallery.

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It requires no great courage to attempt an "appreciation" of anybody, from Homer to Addison, who has long been dead. For if one knows very little about such people, there is really very little to be known—little, that is, to tell us the very men they were. The great figures of the past are either phantoms or statues, things of mist or things of stone, without form or with nothing but form. Of a phantom there can be any view; of a statue there can be essentially but one; the only possible diversity is attained by throwing coloured lights on it, as they do on stage groups. Thus, when literary men say that the time has not yet arrived for a "final estimate" of this person or that, they do not mean that a true estimate may be formed hereafter. All they mean is that any present estimate is liable to effective contradiction. When effective contradiction becomes by the nature of things impossible, we have not necessarily attained truth, but we have achieved what is called "historical perspective."

"Drastic measures," said the schoolboy in *Vice Versa*, "is Latin for a whopping." "Historical perspective" means immunity from being "whopped" for an unlucky guess. The learned professor to whom the mind of his own butler is probably a dark mystery discourses confidently about the secret motives of Tiglath Pilezer or Oliver Cromwell, not because he knows, but because he knows nobody else knows. An anti-authoritarian like Mr. Wells will traverse the said professor's view (if he happens not to like it) with equal decision and for the same reason. Everybody may declare that the professor is right and Mr. Wells wrong. Nobody can prove it.

The case is different when a letter to *The Times*, stating an indisputable but hitherto unpublished fact, may make nonsense of the most ingenious deductions, or when (as in the case of Lord Beaconsfield) light is suddenly thrown on a quite unsuspected corner of

some great man's character. The writer is not foolish enough to pretend to "finality," and will not be greatly perturbed if he is accused of doing less or more than justice to individuals. In some sense the ancients were right in holding that the real purpose of biography was less truth than edification. For the "verdict of history" is a futility when considered in relation to the individual arraigned before its bar; when we can be sure of doing perfect justice in the simplest police case we may begin to talk about the infallibility of a tribunal of pedants. The chief usefulness of such a verdict is that of a sign-post to the living; and for such purpose the rough method of the ancients, who put a halo round one man's head and hung another in chains by the roadside, was perhaps more effective than the modern way of submitting all to the same sort of post-mortem examination. Carry analysis to the length of an autopsy, and hero and scoundrel look very much alike.

The writer's view, it may be repeated, is rather that of the gallery than the green-room. It is least of all that of any individual player's tea-party. The gallery has its defects. Attention is diverted by the crackers of nuts and suckers of oranges. The actors appear quaintly foreshortened, and throw puzzling shadows. The finer by-play sometimes passes unnoticed, or its meaning is not rightly apprehended. There is a tendency, perhaps, to think the man who mouths his part the best actor. But on the whole the gallery knows a good play when it sees it, and is more than any other part of the house free from the more cranky prepossessions of the moment. It has no pose. It has little faddism. It has neither the servility nor the malice of the deadhead. It has paid honest money, and wants honest money's worth, is unaffectedly pleased when it gets it, and frankly angry if it doesn't. It may be too generous when it claps, and a trifle unjust when it hisses. But it is honest in both moods.

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If the writer may sometimes avail himself of the privileges of the gallery to deal frankly with the eminent, he has certainly no bias against the Nineties. He recalls them as, on the whole, a golden'age. The sun shone brighter in those days. The east wind was less bitter. The women were certainly prettier and (perhaps) more modest ; the steaks were juicier ; the landladies were a kindlier race. There was a zest and flavour in life lacking to-day. Youth was emancipated from the harsher kind of parental control, and had not yet found a stern step-father in the State. The world was all before it where to choose, and the future was veiled in a rose-coloured mist. If some well-meaning elder suggested that one might (by working really hard) end by being Attorney-General, or even editor of *The Times*, one said the right thing aloud, but inwardly murmured, "Ambition should be made of jollier stuff." Those were, in short, the days when for men now middle-aged everything was possible, except failure and death : unthinkable things notoriously invented by old fogies to depress the spirits of immortal youth.

One other thing was "unthinkable," and that was war. A "sort of war" was, of course, familiar to the early Nineties ; the public then rather enjoyed seeing the bombardment of Alexandria on the diorama (perhaps it is necessary to explain that the diorama was "the pictures" of that less advanced epoch). It relished small frontier campaigns. It was overjoyed with things like the smashing of Lobengula and the Jameson Raid. The *Liberal Speaker*—the *Nation* of those days—even thought it necessary to reprove the taste which delighted in pictures and descriptions of savage warfare ; it talked about a "recrudescence of barbarism." But of war in the real sense nobody dreamed.

Why should there be war ? We had enough, and to spare, of the earth's surface : some even rather

objected to the addition of the small black baby of Uganda to our enormous family. We were willing to help Germany, as one of the Teutonic family, to help herself to other people's belongings; as for France, the appetite of that "dying nation," its petulance over various more or less important matters—Egypt, Siam, Newfoundland, and the like—was certainly annoying, but war with France, as with anybody else, was—well, "unthinkable." The sound of great guns in the Eastern seas, proclaiming the advent of a Pagan Great Power, broke faintly on English ears, but few heeded the portent. One rather wooden and rigid race had smashed another race even more rigid and wooden, and had done it in a style suggestive of Western efficiency. But that was all. There might be some little stir in the Chancelleries. But no unofficial English head worried itself about a "Far Eastern question," even after Japan had been bundled out of Port Arthur by a combination of European Powers, until towards the very end of the century.

Then, indeed, the clash of war, East, West, and South—in China, in the Philippines, in the Gulf of Mexico, in the Sudan, and in South Africa—might well have suggested some fear of the general toppling over which was to come. But each incident was treated as a thing by itself; of the way the world was going, of the real forces at work, the Nineties had little conception. Rome under the Antonines was not more sure of the impossibility of any fundamental change.

It is not altogether fanciful to connect this insensibility, this half-pathetic faith that whatever was very dull must necessarily be very solid and permanent, with the long reigns of certain European monarchs and the extended lives of many public men. Few remembered any head of the English State but Queen Victoria, or any Austrian Kaiser but Francis Joseph.

William I was only lately dead ; it was but yesterday that the word of Bismarck stood against the world, as it had done for a generation. Mr. Gladstone was still the first figure in British politics till nearly the middle of the Nineties : Lord Salisbury's record extended back to the dim days of Palmerston ; even the Pope seemed immortal. Huxley and Tyndal were survivals of an earlier age ; the old fairy tales of science had grown commonplace, and the newer wonders were still to come ; though there were stirrings in letters and art, on the whole it was still the reign of the old men.

Yet this appearance of changelessness was largely deceptive. The Nineties were essentially a time of transition. They resembled that point in the life of a caterpillar when a change of skin is almost due. The thing is at once lethargic and uneasy ; its qualms and its inertia alike suggest coming dissolution. But beneath its rusty coat the essential activities are going on, and presently the old constrictive covering will split, and a quite new-looking creature emerge. What may be called a sort of fatigued shabbiness was observable in the upper strata of society during the Nineties. The split in the caterpillar's coat had begun, but had not proceeded far ; patches of dead skin, of skin not quite dead, and of new skin thrusting its way through the ancient envelope gave a mottled and unsatisfactory appearance. The old society was visibly finishing ; the new society had only arrived in spots ; and each was not quite sure of itself. The fount of honour, which now plays steadily on new wealth, spirted fitfully after the manner of a " lady-teaser " at a fair. Sometimes the stream hit a Cunliffe-Lister, sometimes a Thomas Lipton. The ancient gentility of the squires still stuck stolidly to the land, but there was a certain restlessness in the younger generation, and when an old man died an old house often changed hands, and a mysterious

somebody from the city arrived who filled the place with troops of week-end friends and gave the impression that he did not much care whether "the county" called or not.

In politics landed Toryism was already giving way to the vigorous urban and suburban varieties; its leaders were mostly stricken in years, and its cadets seemed to lack either ability or ambition. The great entertainers of the old type carried on the tradition with a massive resolution, but, as it seemed, with little conviction; it was the atmosphere of the epilogue, not even of the last act. For over all the older magnificence hung the challenge of the new millionaires who had captured Park Lane. The Embankment was beginning to be what it is now—a *via dollarosa*, sacred to the splendid equipages of men equally great in the City and the West. The old aristocracy seemed conscious that the new pace would kill—the pace of the petrol age just then opening up. They were right. The twentieth century had not much more than dawned before the old caterpillar skin definitely gave way, and something quite new appeared, vigorous and symmetrical, with a keen appetite and a sure objective: the aristocracy of what may be called dynamic wealth, the wealth that reproduces itself by a sort of geometrical progression.

Of this conquest of the old by the new which was proceeding in the Nineties, the closest observer was the working-class politician. While the rest were assuming the permanence of the old conditions, while Liberalism boasted itself Gladstonian, and Conservatism was still Disraelian, Labour sent Mr. Keir Hardie to the House of Commons. It had guessed rightly the main thing that had happened, however mistaken it might be on details. Up to the Nineties Labour was sicklied o'er with the pale cast of the thought of John Stuart Mill. In the Nineties it turned contemptuously away from every "ism" that



lay between Mr. Gladstone's position and Mr. Bradlaugh's. It was now ready to use Liberalism, but for Liberalism, in another sense, it had no use; it was, if such a word can be used where there was no sort of regard, more friendly to the squire than to the rich Radical, but only because in its view the squire did not matter much, and the great Radical did. Since the Nineties Labour has changed less than any party. Its older leaders can—and very often do—make, with applause, the same speeches to-day that struck audiences with a sense of novelty just after the setting up of that great landmark in industrial history—the London dockers' strike.

The middle classes went on as in the days of Noë. They ate, drank, and sang "Ta-ra-ra-boom-deay." For them there never was, and there probably never will be, a period like the Nineties. It was in many ways not a healthy period economically; the school of economic thought which was even then in the making deplored its "deleterious cheapness." Certainly everything was cheap except Consols and Home rails, and human flesh and blood were as cheap as anything. It was a dismal equation the hopelessly (or even hopefully) poor had to work out in terms of pieces of silver and hours of labour. And the hopeful were few; the poor man could, as a rule, see nothing before him but bare subsistence. But those who had money, even a very little, could buy much with it; and it was possible to live a quite liberal life on less than the wages of a dustman of to-day.

For the Londoner especially life went very well then. He suffered from the still undiminished reign of fog and the tall hat. But otherwise his lot was happy. Town was quieter, but just as amusing as it is now, less pretentious, and far less wearing; it had lost both the dismalness and the crude rowdiness of an earlier period, and had not yet developed the raucous note of the modern city. One rumbled

along comfortably on a horse-omnibus, or jingled merrily in a hansom, and was moderately sure of getting somewhere. Superficially everything was slower than now ; practically it was much the same. For if the Underground steam train was a trifle more leisurely, there was never a breakdown ; and if the horse-omnibus was supposed to take ten minutes to Liverpool Street, it got to Liverpool Street in ten minutes. " An hour from the city " meant an hour ; to-day it may mean anything from twenty minutes to a hundred and fifty, according to what the directors think of a Labour leader's economics or the railway and omnibus men of a Minister's policy.

Well-fed, addicted to rather more healthy ideas of recreation than his predecessors, amazingly ignorant of the outside world, deplorably educated, but not unintelligent, the average young man of the Nineties was decidedly self-satisfied. He thought himself a credit to his country, and thought his country the only country worth mentioning. Continentals were people who provided us with music-hall entertainers, barbers, bakers, cheap clerks, and picturesque guests to see the recurrent Jubilee, when John Bull, like a hospitable host, bared his big right arm and showed his muscle to the visitors—in the form of a naval display at Spithead and a procession of white, black, and yellow troops through the streets of London. The American hardly counted.

" Ta-ra-ra-boom-deay " was the personal note of the period. " Soldiers of the Queen "—

" When we say that England's *master*,  
Remember who have made *her* so "—

represented the national gesture of the time : a time of boundless confidence sustained on a basis in one sense horribly insecure and in another firm as adamant. For, while the shakiness of the material foundation of England's " mastery " was soon to be

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exposed, the man of the Nineties was to be otherwise justified in his careless faith. In "reeking tube and iron shard" we were found but second-rate; it was the qualities the Nineties rather went out of their way to deride that pulled us through the evil days that followed that singular time. The English character might seem a little vulgarised just then, a little disfigured by superficial cynicism, but it still had its fellow to seek. And it was just the young rowdy of that day, and not the elder who rebuked him, who saved the period in the good opinion of its successors. The older men of the Nineties had more than a touch of Polonius; they were excellent in counsel, but of "most weak hams." But if it was the autumn of the old excellences, it was the springtide of other things, and the Nineties will always have a claim on the reverence of Englishmen as the breeding and growing time of men as brave as any of our blood.

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IN a work like the present, where personal impressions are so largely mingled with the results of general and special reading, it is not easy to give the authority for every statement. Specific borrowings are indicated in the text. The author, however, would like to add an acknowledgment of his general obligation to the following :

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- "Life of Sir Frank Lockwood." Augustine Birrell.
- "Cecil John Rhodes." Sir Thomas E. Fuller.
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Some of these portraits originally appeared in *The Outlook*.

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