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STATESMEN SERIES.

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SIR ROBERT PEEL.

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STATESMEN SERIES.

LIFE OF
SIR ROBERT PEEL.

BY
F. C. MONTAGU

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PREFATORY NOTE.



THE materials for the life of a statesman are in part the same with the materials for the history of his State. It would be affectation to try to give a list of the principal sources of English history in the first half of this century. They are extremely copious, and they are accessible to everybody.

For what relates more particularly to the career of Sir Robert Peel, his speeches and memoirs must take precedence of other authorities. No complete collection of his speeches has ever been made; but everything which he said in the House of Commons has been reprinted in four stout volumes. Peel's memoirs are disappointing. They are not an autobiography, but a collection of materials for the justification of the author's conduct at three of the most memorable periods in his life—the period of Catholic Emancipation, the period of his first Administration, and the period of the repeal of the Corn Laws. They fell flat upon the public, which had long since passed on to other topics of interest; but

they are valuable to the biographer, because we have so little except speeches from Peel himself.

Previous lives of Peel afford little help to the writer of a new Life. Sir Lawrence Peel's sketch contains some interesting particulars respecting the family, but does not tell much about the hero. Lord Dalling's sketch is brilliant and appreciative, but rather a criticism than a biography. M. Guizot's study of Sir Robert Peel is able, but errs in giving undue consequence to transactions in which Guizot was personally concerned, and which he wished to justify to his countrymen. Beside these and other sketches of Peel, two voluminous Lives have been published. Doubleday's *Life of Sir Robert Peel* is the work of an industrious writer just acute enough to be eccentric. Cook Taylor's *Life of Sir Robert Peel* is a wordy narrative, which tells next to nothing, and is swollen to a dropsy by interminable quotations from *Hansard*.

Many scattered facts respecting Peel may be gathered from the Lives of other statesmen more fortunate in their biographers. Among such Lives one may mention that of Liverpool, by Yonge; that of Althorp, by Le Marchant; that of Melbourne, by Torrens; that of Palmerston, by Bulwer; that of Cobden, by Morley; and especially that of Bentinck, by Disraeli. Still more information is to be gathered from such publications as the *Greville Memoirs* and the *Croker Papers*. The

Greville Memoirs tell us more about Peel than do all the published Lives of Peel put together. They give us that which is so valuable, the successive impressions of an acute and well-informed contemporary, who was neither superior to his age nor yet enslaved by its party spirit. The *Croker Papers* contain many letters which throw the strongest light upon certain critical moments of Peel's career. To prolong the list of less useful authorities would need much more space than can be afforded here.

But the most precious of all authorities for the life of Peel as yet remains unused. Peel preserved every letter which he received and a copy of every letter which he wrote. His entire correspondence is now in the hands of the Peel trustees. But the huge size of the collection has defeated the collector's purpose. The selection from its contents, so long promised to the public, is still delayed from year to year. In the meantime, the papers remain inaccessible. The present sketch is offered to the public as a candid summary of the facts hitherto ascertained respecting Sir Robert Peel.

F. C. M.

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