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HISTORICAL SKETCHES

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HISTORICAL SKETCHES

OF NOTABLE PERSONS AND
EVENTS IN THE REIGNS OF
JAMES I. AND CHARLES I.

BY

THOMAS CARLYLE

EDITED BY
ALEXANDER CARLYLE
B.A.

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P R E F A C E

To write a Book on the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth of England, was one of Carlyle's earliest literary aspirations. His 'First Note-book,' beginning on the 22nd of March 1822, opens with comments and observations on Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, which he had then just begun to read. There follow many pages of criticisms on that Work and quotations from it, showing how deeply Carlyle was interested in the subject. Before a month had gone by he had read the most of Clarendon, the whole of Ludlow's *Memoirs*, a great part of Milton's Prose Writings, and other Works which throw light upon that period. Under date 15th April of the same year, there is this entry in the Note-book: 'Must *it*,' his contemplated Book, 'be sketches of English character generally, during the Commonwealth; containing portraits of Milton, Cromwell, Fox, Hyde, etc., in the manner of De Staël's *Allemagne*? The spirit is willing—but ah! the flesh—!' In a few days more he had come nearer to a decision: 'Within the last month,' he writes on the 27th of April, to his brother Alexander, 'I have well-nigh fixed upon a topic. My purpose . . . is to come out with a kind of Essay on the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth of England—not to write a History of them—but to exhibit, if I can, some features of the national character as it was then displayed, supporting my remarks by mental portraits drawn with my best ability, of Cromwell, Laud, George Fox, Milton, Hyde, etc., the most distinguished of the actors in that great scene.'

The scheme thus described had to be relinquished for a time; other engagements of a more promising or practical nature, intervened, which need not be recounted here. It is enough to say,