

LIFE SKETCHES ⁰⁷

OF

EMINENT LAWYERS,

AMERICAN, ENGLISH AND CANADIAN,

TO WHICH IS ADDED

THOUGHTS, FACTS AND FACETIÆ.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

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AMERICAN, ENGLISH AND CANADIAN LAWYERS,"

IN TWO EDITIONS.

KANSAS CITY, MO.:
LAWYERS' INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING CO.
1895.

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LORD THOMAS ERSKINE, ENGLAND.

(1750-1823.)

For more than a quarter of a century the foremost advocate in England in behalf of life and liberty. Born January 10, 1750, in a small, ill-furnished room in an upper flat in Edinburgh, Scotland, the youngest son of David, the impecunious tenth Earl of Buchan. Died November 17, 1823, aged seventy-three. A high school and academic education before fourteen, four years in the navy, as many in the army, without a collegiate education, but a mastery of Milton, Dryden, Pope and Shakespeare, becoming so saturated with the former and the latter that he could hold conversations for days in their language, constituted his foundation for the study of law after twenty-five. Admitted at twenty-eight, he suddenly made his reputation in his first case, *King v. Baillie*, for the defendant, receiving a yet preserved guinea as a fee. This speech stamped him as the foremost advocate of England, and briefs poured in upon him until his annual income was \$60,000.

He was engaged in the court-martial of Lord Keppel; in the defense of Lieutenant Bourne of the navy for challenging Sir James Wallace; the Mother-ill case; the defense of Lord Gordon, charged with high treason; the Dean of St. Asaph for seditious libel; the Stockdale case, growing out of the Hastings impeachment, his speech being the finest ever delivered at the English bar, winning a verdict which forever established the freedom of the press; the Horne Tooke case; Hardy for treason; the Thelwell case; the Stone case, and the prosecution of Williams for publishing Paine's "Age of Reason." Perhaps his greatest display was the defense of Hadfield for attempting the life of George the Third.

He was appointed Chancellor, and created a Peer in 1806. His decisions are found in 12-13 Vesey. His last important case was the defense of Queen Caroline in the House of Lords. Nothing can be added to Lord Campbell's estimate: "As an advocate in the forum he was without an equal in ancient or modern times." He was of medium height, slender, quick and nervous, handsome and magnetic.

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