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Sydney H. Zebel
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SYDNEY H. ZEBEL

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PREFACE

Authors of scholarly books customarily begin by offering their readers an explanation of their aims or purpose – and couple with this a statement indicating the unique or original character of their work. My justification for writing this biography is quite simple. Although a sizable literature on Balfour already exists – including a fragmentary autobiography, two informative but essentially laudatory full-length biographies (one by a member of Balfour’s family, the other by a Tory-oriented journalist), numerous contemporary studies and essays of varying merit, and a growing number of specialized monographs and scholarly articles – no professional historian has hitherto attempted a balanced account or appraisal of his extraordinarily eventful and interesting career. My biography seeks to fill this void and will be of value, I hope, to both the student of history and the general reader. Since Balfour was primarily important as a political figure – despite his excursions into philosophy, science, and other fields – the major emphasis must inevitably be on politics; and hence the sub-title.

Balfour, as we shall see, was a successful and oft-times constructive Conservative leader whose public activities spanned the reigns of three monarchs and more than five decades of British history. By virtue of his long-continued influence over men and events, he was a truly significant figure and was so recognized by his contemporaries – even by those Liberals and Radicals who opposed him. Knowledge of his role and activities may offer new insights into late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British political, diplomatic and imperial developments. A few preliminary words are in order about his character and personality. Although usually described as enigmatic or puzzling, he seems no more – and no less – complex than many other front-rank figures in history.¹ His salient traits were intelligence, ambition, adaptability, and growth. While holding fast to patrician values throughout his

¹ Balfour’s seemingly contradictory statements on public issues, which confused contem-

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life, he displayed more than ordinary success in coming to terms with an ever more complex and fast-changing world.

I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to all of the previous writers on Balfour whose works I have consulted. Also, for permitting me to examine and quote from manuscripts in their custody, I wish to thank each of the following: the Earl and Countess of Balfour (the Arthur James Balfour and Gerald Balfour MSS, Whittingehame), the trustees of the British Museum (the A. J. Balfour, Iddesleigh and C. P. Scott MSS), the trustees of the National Library of Scotland (the Haldane MSS), the keepers of the Scottish Record Office (the Lothian MSS) and the keepers of the Public Record Office (the Cabinet Minutes). I am grateful to the trustees of the First Beaverbrook Foundation for allowing me to examine the Bonar Law and Lloyd George MSS and for granting permission to quote from these papers and from Lloyd George's own publications. I am likewise grateful to the Beaverbrook trustees for allowing me to examine the St Loe Strachey MSS and wish also to thank *The Spectator* for permitting me to quote from them. A special word of thanks to the keepers, and to Mr J. K. Bates, of the Scottish Record Office, for their many personal courtesies during my stay in Edinburgh.

Numerous academic colleagues and friends read this book in manuscript and offered valuable suggestions. Professor Peter Stansky of Stanford University, the editor of the Conference of British Studies Biographical Series, and Professor Benjamin Klebaner of the City University of New York were particularly helpful. Mrs Paulette Slansky assisted by typing the manuscript. As ever, my wife's inspiration and selfless support were indispensable.

porary as well as later writers, may be explained by his desire to avoid needless disputes or friction. A very clever and subtle political tactician, he often deliberately resorted to verbal obfuscation. Balfour's frequent practice in preparing letters or memoranda on controversial subjects was to restate, with seeming approval, the arguments offered by critics or opponents: he gradually modified or altered these in the course of his logical analysis; then, having minimized or blurred the differences, he presented his own ideas near the very end. Thus statements quoted from the opening paragraph or paragraphs of such documents, even though phrased by Balfour, may not really represent Balfour's views at all.

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Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the administrative officers of Rutgers University and to the Rutgers University Research Council for encouraging me to engage in this work of scholarship.

S.H.Z.

January 1972