The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of The Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke
The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of The Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke LL.D.

With a Transcript of The Minute Book of the Debating "Club" founded by him in Trinity College Dublin

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With an Introduction and Supplementary Chapters on Burke's Contributions to the Reformer and his part in the Lucas Controversy by The Rt. Hon. Arthur Warren Samuels P.C. LL.D.
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Cambridge: At the University Press MDCCCLXXII.
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From the portrait by John Hoppner, R.A., in the theatre, Trinity College, Dublin, painted for T.C.D., 1795. (Reduced by kind permission of Messrs Bell & Sons, Ltd., from the full length photogravure in McKay and Roberts, John Hoppner, 1909.)

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INTRODUCTION

THE circumstances under which this book is produced are these. My only son, Arthur P. I. Samuels, its author, when an undergraduate in Trinity College, Dublin, devoted himself mainly to the study of history, economics and political science. He gained high honours and graduated as Senior Moderator and Gold Medallist in these subjects in 1909. He was unanimously elected Auditor of the College Historical Society for the session 1910 to 1911; the honour is the highest Trinity students can confer on one of their number. He delivered an inaugural address on “Irish Possibilities,” containing suggestions for the government and administration of Ireland, which, if adopted, might have proved of great practical value, had not “The Impossible” since arrived.

When Auditor he was urged by the members of the Society to edit the original Minute Book of the “Club” founded by Edmund Burke, from which the College Historical Society traces its origin. He undertook the work, but soon came to the conclusion that it was desirable to extend its scope, and to present a picture of Burke’s early life and undergraduate surroundings if his utterances and those of his fellow-members as summarised in the Minute Book of the Club were to be presented in an historical setting. This portion of Burke’s career had not been treated fully by his biographers. He accordingly investigated the records in the Muniment Room in Trinity College, and studied the newspapers, pamphlets and memoirs of the day, annotated Burke’s early correspondence, and made other researches with the object of placing in perspective the undergraduate life of Trinity College in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the surroundings amid which Burke thought and worked.

The manuscript of this book was nearing completion by my son when the War broke out in August, 1914. He was an officer of the Dublin University Officers’ Training Corps and had been in training in July with his Corps at Murnoe Park, near Mallow. He had there taken the opportunity of visiting the neighbourhood of Monanimy and Castletown-Roche, where Burke’s boyhood was spent, and was engaged in making enquiries there when called to take his part in the Great War. He left with the manuscript further notes and suggestions for investigation, which I have used in preparing this
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book for publication. He was commissioned to the 11th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles, and gazetted Captain in 1914. The Battalion formed part of the famous 36th Ulster Division. He was wounded in the commencement of the Battle of the Somme at Thiepval where his battalion, fighting with the utmost valour, was almost annihilated. He continued to serve in the Ypres salient, and, on the eve of higher promotion, fell at Messines, on 24th September, 1916, shot through the brain.

Pressure of parliamentary and administrative duties prevented me for a considerable time from taking up the trust of completing his work on Burke. I have given in full some of the documents from the Public Record Office, Dublin, which he had more briefly referred to, as owing to the execrable destruction on 1st July, 1922, of that magnificent and irreplaceable collection, reference to the originals will never again be possible. As a similar fate may now be awaiting other libraries and depositories of records in Ireland, some quotations from different documents are also given in what may possibly appear to be too great detail.

It was my son’s great desire to have had an opportunity of collating Burke’s early correspondence, as published, with the actual letters, and to have seen the documents in the possession of the Shackleton family. He had not that opportunity; but through the great kindness and courtesy of Mrs Lydia Pilgrim, of Colne, and her brother, Edward B. fiennell, Esq., M.D., the direct descendants of Richard Shackleton, in whose possession these letters and other valuable manuscripts now are, I have had the advantage of seeing them. I have compared the letters, and corrected some errors and supplied some omissions which occurred in those that were printed in the Leadbeater Papers and Fitzwilliam Edition of Burke’s Correspondence. I have also added some of Burke’s juvenile poems that are among the Shackleton papers and have not hitherto been published.

My son was called away by duty and death before he recovered (as he undoubtedly would have done) Burke’s lost first literary production, the Reformer. In following up some indications left by him, I was fortunate enough to discover that Mr E. R. McC. Dix had in his unique collection of old Irish newspapers the full series of this most interesting miscellany, which is not to be found in any of the great public libraries. Burke’s contributions to the Reformer are published in the Appendix.

An entirely new aspect of Burke’s first political publications, and of the part he took in the Lucas Controversy, and his attitude towards the problems raised in that agitation, is presented in this volume. My son’s view was that the part in it assigned to Burke by Prior, and other
INTRODUCTION

biographers, was incredible; and that a full investigation of the literature of the controversy would probably disclose by internal evidence what were Burke's actual contributions to it. I accordingly read through the mass of pamphlets on the “Lucasian Controversy,” which are collected in Trinity College, the King’s Inns Library, and the Royal Irish Academy, and have come to the conclusion, which I submit with some confidence, that Burke's part in it has been completely misrepresented, and that he was not the opponent but the supporter of the views advocated by Lucas. I have ventured to print in a supplement full extracts from the pamphlets which seem to me to bear unmistakably the impress of Burke's literary style, and to anticipate his method of political reasoning.

Such imperfections as are in this work are mine, if it has any merits they are entirely my son’s.

Perhaps I may be pardoned for adding some personal details about him who was the author of this work. After graduating in Trinity College, Dublin, he was called to the Irish Bar in Trinity Term, 1910. He joined the North-West Circuit, and had begun to get into practice. On 16th December, 1913, he married Dorothy Gage, only daughter of George Young, D.L., of Culdaff, Co. Donegal. There was no issue of the marriage. After his death she served as a nurse in France until the end of the War. She has put at my disposal all the materials that were in her hands relating to this work.

What sort of man its author proved under the test of War may be gathered from those with whom he served. They universally speak of him as an officer of outstanding gallantry and devotion to duty, fearless, cool-headed, and a thinker, who had developed into a really fine soldier, worshipped by all his young officers and idolised by his men, of great capacity and intellect and destined to high command.

After all he was but one of the Innumerable—but one, too, of the many, many of his class-fellows and companions in Trinity College who fell in the Great War. The devoted generation of young Irishmen, such as he, trained and educated like him, and with aspirations such as his, has been almost exterminated. Whether there was to be left any longer a place for such as they in their native land—is a question they have not had to solve. Perhaps this volume may be taken as some surviving service to his Country by one of them, who had tried in his time to serve her, and had hoped to serve her more.

Arthur Warren Samuels.

23rd September, 1922.
P R E F A C E

MEMBERS of the College Historical Society of Trinity College, Dublin, have frequently expressed the wish that the Minute Book of the original Debating Club, founded by Edmund Burke in 1747, which lies amongst the records of the Society, should be published. The biographers of Burke give but little information about his early life; none of them had access to this manuscript, which throws important light on the period of his career when he was an undergraduate. His surroundings—how he thought—what he thought—the influences which acted upon him—and the impulses which inspired him—in those assimilative years, when the character of the great philosopher-statesman was being moulded, are matters of absorbing interest; and in the précis of the College debates contained in the Minute Book of the Club, and kept mainly in his own hand-writing, will be found the germ of many of the ideas and the utterances of Burke, which afterwards impressed the world.

I have thought it desirable to prefix to the transcript a narrative of Burke’s early life and school and college days. The main source of our information for these periods is contained in the Leadbeater Papers published in 1862; volumes which are difficult now to obtain and which deal only in a subsidiary way with Edmund Burke. No attempt has hitherto been made to edit the correspondence between Burke and Richard Shackleton contained in them. It throws much light on Burke’s pursuits, life and ideas when a student in Trinity College, and frequently refers to the intended formation of the Debating Society, the minutes of which are reproduced in the following pages. A few additional letters dealing with the period covered by Burke’s college career are printed in the Fitzwilliam Edition of his correspondence; and Prior, in the fifth edition of his Life of Burke, gives excerpts from some correspondence between Shackleton and other college friends of Burke which I have made use of. I have also incorporated a few letters printed in now forgotten magazines, and have had access to some hitherto unpublished material.

Frequent reference has been made to Gilbert’s History of Dublin, and to contemporary Dublin newspapers, pamphlet literature and

1 The Leadbeater Papers: a Selection from the MSS. and Correspondence of Mary Leadbeater. 2 vols. London, Bell and Daldy. 1862.
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PREFACE

memoirs in this attempt to weave together an account of Burke’s undergraduate career.

I am indebted to the Officers and Committee of the College Historical Society for their permission to publish the Minute Book, and to the authorities of Trinity College, Dublin, for allowing me access to the records of the College. I am under peculiar obligations to my friend Mr T. U. Sadleir, M.A., whose research and intimate knowledge of social and public life in Dublin during the eighteenth century is displayed in his contributions to the volumes published by the Georgian Society, and produced under his editorship. I am also indebted to my uncle, Professor William Ridgeway¹, LL.D., Sc.D., Litt.D., F.B.A., of Cambridge University, and to Mr F. Elrington Ball, Litt.D., for much valuable information and assistance.

ARTHUR P. I. SAMUELS.

August, 1914.

¹ Now Sir William Ridgeway.
NOTE

References to documents as being in the Irish Record Office, Dublin, must be taken as of the time when
the manuscript of this volume was written. Almost all such documents have since perished in the
destruction of the Four Courts, Dublin, and the
Record Office on 1st July, 1922.
PLATE I

THE RT. HON. EDMUND BURKE, LL.D.
From the portrait by John Hoppner, R.A., in the theatre, Trinity College, Dublin, painted for T.C.D., 1791. (Reduced by kind permission of Messrs Bell & Sons, Ltd., from the full length photogravure in McKay and Roberts, *John Hoppner*, 1909.)