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Alexander Todd

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A time to remember

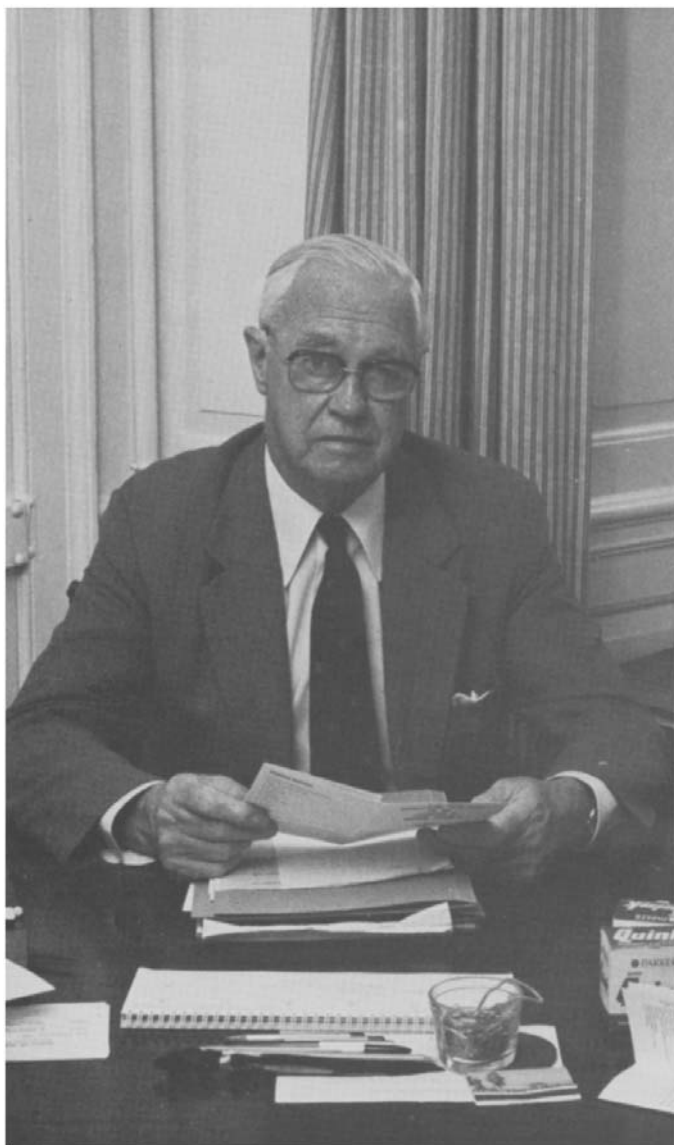
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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A CHEMIST



ALEXANDER TODD

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Preface

In recent years it has fallen to my lot to prepare biographical memoirs of a number of eminent Fellows of the Royal Society and in doing so I have been struck with the paucity of information obtainable about their lives and careers, although at least some of them had been associated with major scientific discoveries and had risen from quite humble beginnings to positions of power and influence. It is comparatively easy to track down speeches and lectures given by individuals, and their contributions to science are recorded in the technical literature. Based on such material one can discuss the impact of a person's work and views, but can give little impression of the man himself or the events which influenced his career. In the light of my experience in seeking such information about others, I decided that I should place on record an account of my own life and career in the hope that the pathway from childhood in Glasgow to a Nobel Prize, the House of Lords, and the Presidency of the Royal Society might prove of some interest. Hence this autobiography.

I would emphasise that I have eschewed detailed discussion and argument about my participation in, and views about, public affairs during the latter part of my career; these are matters more appropriate to a different type of book. I have, of course, included, where appropriate, comments on a variety of problems and institutions with which I have been concerned, and I have added as appendices extracts from my Anniversary Addresses to the Royal Society and my Presidential Address to

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the British Association for the Advancement of Science. I am indebted to these bodies for permission to reproduce the Addresses which set out at some length my views on a number of issues of public concern. In the main, however, what I have written is a general account of my life until about the end of 1980, with emphasis on events which have shaped my career. I have described these events, including their lighter as well as their more serious aspects, as accurately as I can remember them. Memory is, however, a fickle thing and with the passage of time details can become blurred, or even confused. I do not think there are serious inaccuracies in my narrative, but if I have misquoted anyone I hope he or she will forgive me.

My thanks are due to many colleagues and friends who have encouraged me to write these memoirs, and especially to my wife whose patience and memory are both much better than mine, and to Miss Susan Brownell for the skill and effort which she devoted uncomplainingly to the preparation of the manuscript for publication.

Alexander Todd

*Cambridge**October 1982*