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978-0-521-14254-0 - The Cambridge Apostles: The Early Years

Peter Allen

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APOSTLES
THE EARLY YEARS

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PREFACE

This book deals with the origins and early history of a club at Cambridge, formally known as the Cambridge Conversazione Society, more popularly as the Cambridge Apostles. Although the Apostles are secretive about their membership and proceedings, it is well known that this student discussion group has been a training-ground for a long succession of gifted and unusual men. It is also known to have played an important part in several literary and intellectual movements, the most famous of which is the Bloomsbury Group. My subject is the group of Apostles who first established the club's influential role. This group developed in the years just before the first Reform Bill, and its central figures were Frederick Denison Maurice, Arthur Hallam and Alfred Tennyson.

The book arose from my interest in the social side of Victorian cultural history. Nearly all the artists and thinkers of the Victorian period, like those of any period, were deeply influenced by their social relations with one another. The Victorian intelligentsia consisted of several interconnected communities, one of them a numerous and powerful set of liberal intellectuals whose most notable spokesmen in the eighteen-forties and fifties included Maurice and Tennyson. In the religious controversies that rocked Victorian Britain this group appeared as the Broad Church movement, but this was only one aspect of the role they played in the cultural affairs of the time. Though they held avant-garde opinions they were well-respected members of Victorian society, and through their writings and their work in a number of professions they exerted a persistent force over public opinion. They were especially noticeable in the educational system, and here they found many new members for the group among their students. They not only taught one another: they married into one another's families and promoted one another's careers. In time, this network of personal relationships gave rise to a movement or social tradition of liberal

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intellectualism, extending from the group that surrounded Maurice and Tennyson to such groups as the Bloomsbury set, who were not only their cultural successors but, in several cases, their descendants.

I learned that this tradition could be traced back to two distinct intellectual coteries of the eighteen-twenties and thirties – at Oxford the so-called ‘Oriental Noetics’ and at Cambridge the Apostles. The Apostles especially intrigued me, for their influence can be observed in the history of the liberal intelligentsia from the eighteen-twenties down to Bloomsbury. Further investigation of the early Apostles revealed a great mass of manuscript material about them, consisting for the most part of the very interesting and amusing letters they sent one another. Since this material was so abundant and so much of it of interest to others besides specialists in the field, I decided to write a documentary account of the group. This book, then, presents a study in intellectual companionship by telling the story of the early Apostles. Quoting extensively from their correspondence and other contemporary records, it describes the group’s principal figures, explains their roles and recounts the origins, development, activities and eventual fate of the group as a whole.

There have been many brief treatments of the early Apostles but only one full-length book, Frances M. Brookfield’s very readable but somewhat misleading work, *The Cambridge ‘Apostles’* (1906). I have been able to locate all the material used by Mrs Brookfield and much that was unavailable to her. In 1906 Mrs Brookfield had to rely on Wemyss Reid’s biography of Lord Houghton; since then a much better biography has been drawn from the Houghton MSS, and they have been given to Trinity College, Cambridge. Excerpts from these papers and from other manuscripts in the Trinity College Library (notably the papers of W. H. Thompson) are published with the kind permission of the Master and Fellows of the College. Mrs Brookfield was sent transcripts of the many letters owned by Mrs Catharine Barham Johnson of Norwich (the granddaughter of both J. M. Kemble and W. B. Donne); her daughter, Miss Mary Barham Johnson, has very generously given me access to the collection itself and has helped me in many ways, especially by taking time from the edition of these letters that she is preparing to give my manuscript the benefit of her expert opinion. And Mrs Brookfield probably did not know of J. W. Blakesley’s papers, now owned by his granddaughter, Mrs C. G. Chenevix-Trench, who not only went to the trouble of unearthing them for me but very kindly gave me unrestricted use of this material, almost none of which

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has ever been published. For permission to quote from hitherto unpublished writings by Donne, Kemble and Blakesley I am indebted to Miss Johnson and Mr Anthony Chenevix-Trench.

Other relations of the early Apostles who have been kind enough to show me family papers or to advise me about the existence and location of manuscripts are Mrs Julius Chenevix-Trench, Major Charles Chenevix-Trench, Mr F. J. A. Cruso, Mrs J. G. Dower, Mr S. H. Grylls, Miss Félicité Hardcastle, Mr M. R. Heath, Miss Elizabeth Lennard, Sir Stephen Lennard, Lord Talbot de Malahide, Mr R. L. Bayne Powell, Professor Joan Robinson, Sir Michael Venables-Llewellyn and Mrs G. M. J. L. Whitmore. For permission to quote from hitherto unpublished writings of Arthur Hallam, F. D. Maurice and W. E. Gladstone I am indebted to Sir Stephen Lennard, Professor Joan Robinson and Sir William Gladstone. Material from the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, is quoted by kind permission of Lord Tennyson and the Lincolnshire Library Service.

I have had access to two partial transcripts of the Society's record books for the period of Arthur Hallam's active membership, and I have also been so fortunate as to have been given a complete list of the early membership of the Society. This list, with some emendations, appears as an appendix to this volume.

I have been greatly helped by scholars in related fields. The late T. H. Vail Motter and the late A. M. Terhune were extraordinarily generous in their advice. I am much indebted to Dr Motter's successor as the editor of Arthur Hallam's letters, Professor Jack Kolb, for his help and especially for his criticism of chapter 9. My colleagues Merrill Distad, Phyllis Grosskurth, S. P. Rosenbaum and W. D. Shaw have been especially helpful, and for their advice on a multitude of matters I am indebted to Colin Butler, Lovat Dickson, J. R. de J. Jackson, Paul Levy, Michael Millgate, Francis Mineka, Christopher Ricks, J. M. Robson, J. C. Thirlwall and Cleve Want.

I am very grateful to Dr Philip Gaskell and his assistants at Trinity College Library, Trevor Kaye and Pat Bradford, for their help, and I should like to record my gratitude to the staff of the Anderson Room, Cambridge University Library; to Mr N. C. Buck of St John's College Library; to the late A. N. L. Munby of King's College Library; to Dr J. S. Lawton of St Deinol's Library; to Mr Thompson, Chief Clerk of the Cambridge Union Debating Society; to Mr G. M. Griffiths and Mrs Kathleen Hughes of the National Library of Wales; to Mr David E. Muspratt, archivist of the Working Men's College; to the staff of

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the Manuscript Room, Princeton University Library; and to the staff of the Reference Department, University of Toronto Library.

The Canada Council and the University of Toronto provided financial support for my research, and I am also indebted to my Department at the University of Toronto for providing me with the services of a research assistant, Margaret Adelman, who was a great help to me. Gregory Andrachuk helped me with the Spanish sources for chapter 7; Philippa Simpson, Lorna Wreford and Alina Gildiner gave me able secretarial assistance, moral support and advice. My friend Ellen Charney and my father R. O. Allen listened patiently to me and read the manuscript in its entirety: I am deeply indebted to them for their suggestions, from which I have tried to profit. Lord Annan, whose work on the Victorian 'intellectual aristocracy' was one of my original sources of inspiration, has shown great kindness to me and helped me in many ways. My teacher, friend and colleague F. E. L. Priestley not only subjected an earlier scheme for this book to the most searching and helpful criticism but has persistently encouraged me in my work; without his help the book might never have been completed.

Innis College,
University of Toronto, 1977

Peter Allen

TEXTUAL NOTE

In the transcriptions of manuscript material that appear in this book I have silently expanded conventional handwritten abbreviations (such as 'wd' for 'would' and '&' for 'and') but have used square brackets in expanding unconventional abbreviations, in interpolating words and letters missing from worn manuscripts, and in adding punctuation and comments of my own. A few distracting oddities of spelling (such as 'agreeable' for 'agreable' or 'it's' for 'its') have been silently corrected.