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Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Baronet

Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786–1845) was a noted social reformer and one of the leading members of the campaign to abolish slavery. Buxton had family connections to the Quakers and became an associate of Elizabeth Fry in campaigning for prison reform. He was elected an MP in 1818 and from 1825 he became the leader of the abolitionist movement in Parliament following William Wilberforce's retirement from politics. This biography, written by his son Charles Buxton and first published in 1848, provides an intimate and detailed account of Buxton's character and involvement with social reform and the abolition movement, culminating in the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act. The inclusion of Buxton's letters to family, friends and colleagues provides valuable insights into his character and his thoughts on the progress of the abolition movement and other political events connected to the campaign for abolition.

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With Selections from his Correspondence

THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON
EDITED BY CHARLES BUXTON



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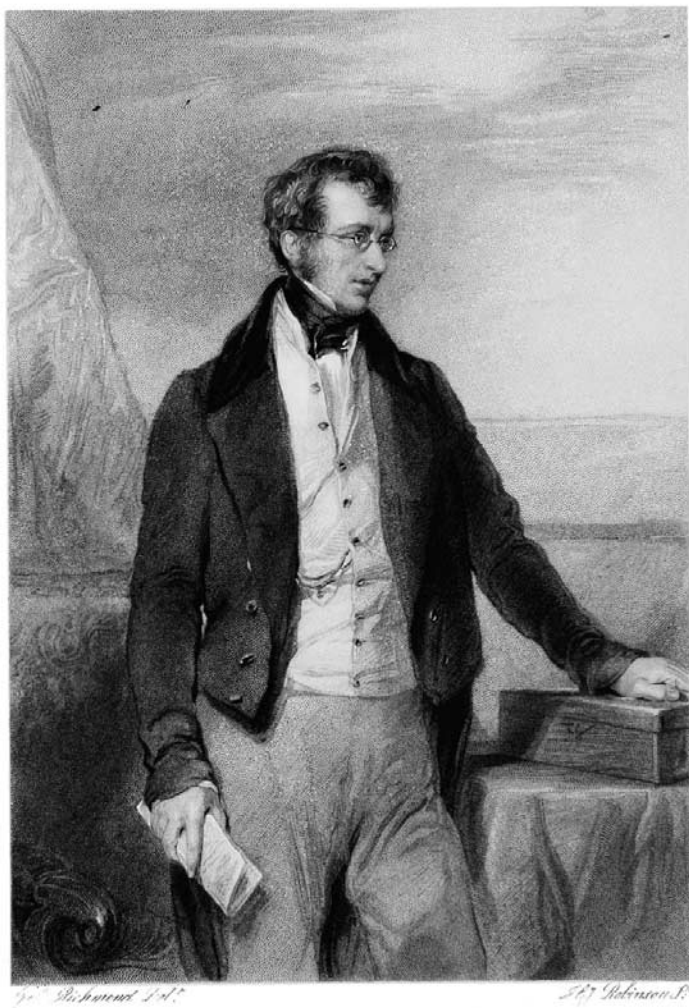
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London, John

MEMOIRS
OF
SIR THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON,
BARONET.
WITH
SELECTIONS FROM HIS CORRESPONDENCE.
EDITED BY HIS SON,
CHARLES BUXTON, ESQ.

“The longer I live, the more I am certain that the great difference between men, between the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant, is *energy, invincible determination* — a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory. That quality will do any thing that can be done in this world; and no talents no circumstances, no opportunities, will make a two-legged creature a man without it.” — (*Extract of a Letter from Sir T. Fowell Buxton.*)

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P R E F A C E.

A GENERAL and very reasonable objection is made against memoirs written by near relatives, and yet the danger to be apprehended from their partiality is not perhaps quite so great as it might seem. At any rate it is not wholly avoided by transferring the task to a stranger. It has been well observed, that “biographers, translators, editors, all, in short, who employ themselves in illustrating the lives or the writings of others, are peculiarly exposed to the disease of admiration.”* Now a near relative may be especially liable to this infirmity; but then he is especially on his guard against it. He cannot eulogise: he must state facts, and leave the reader to draw conclusions for himself.

The task of compiling my father’s memoirs was placed in my hands by his executors, partly because those whose literary abilities would have pointed them out as fitted for the task were not at leisure to undertake it; and partly because it involved the perusal of a large mass of private papers, which could not well have been submitted to the inspection of any one not a member of his family. I could hardly refuse so interesting, though responsible, a duty.

A considerable portion of this work relates to the

* Macaulay’s *Essays*, vol. ii. p. 146.

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PREFACE.

emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies ; and I cannot help feeling some anxiety lest it may give a false prominence to my father's exertions in the accomplishment of that event, which was, in fact, achieved by the strenuous efforts of many men, working in very different spheres. It was not for me to attempt to write the history of that extensive movement. The object set before me was to show, as plainly as possible, what sort of person my father was, so that the reader should feel as if he had been one of his most intimate friends. I was bound, therefore, to confine my narrative to his individual proceedings, excluding whatever did not bear, directly or indirectly, on the elucidation of his character. Hence it has resulted that very slight notice is taken in these pages of the exertions of my father's coadjutors, in achieving the downfall of British slavery.

I cannot conclude without gratefully acknowledging the valuable contributions I have received from several of my father's friends, the advice and assistance given by others, and the documents and papers put into my hands by those who were in intimate communication with him, before I was of an age to share in that privilege.

March, 1848.

23. St. James's Place, London.

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