

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06956-4 - The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer,

Lord Lytton: Volume 1

Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton

Excerpt

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# AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

VOL. I.

B

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*To the*  
*READER OF THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.*

IN my father's relation of the first twenty-three years of his life there is a slight chronological error, which may be best corrected here. He was the youngest of three brothers, the only children of General Earle Bulwer, of Heydon in Norfolk, by his marriage with Elizabeth Barbara, the daughter and sole heiress of Richard Warburton Lytton, of Knebworth in Hertfordshire. Their father died during the childhood of his sons. William, the eldest of them, who then succeeded to the paternal estates of Heydon and Dalling in Norfolk, was born in the year 1799, and died, at the age of seventy-six, in 1877, having survived his two younger brothers. Henry, the second son (who in 1871 received the Barony, now extinct, of Dalling and Bulwer), was born in 1801, and died without issue in 1872, at the age of seventy-one. Edward, the youngest of the three, who died at the beginning of 1873 in his seventieth year, has mentioned in his Autobiography that, between his own birth and that of his brother Henry, another boy was born, who died immediately afterwards. But of the short-lived existence of this fourth brother I can find no trace in any parochial or family record.

To my father himself, the exact date of his birth was unknown; nor had he any care to know it. He says of it, in his Autobiography, 'If some curious impertinents are anxious to know in what year of Our Lord that event took place, let

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them find it out for themselves.' And, when questioned about it, he would laughingly reply, 'It is a Cretan mystery.' The mystery, however, is resolved, and partly explained, by reference to the register of the parish church of St. Mary-le-bone, Middlesex; which records the fact that Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer was born on the 25th of May in the year 1803. But it appears from the register that he was not baptised till the 15th of March, 1810, when he was nearly seven years old.

It is not surprising that a child who was seven years old at the time of his baptism should have regarded the date of his birth as a mystery. But to a child of that age the baptismal ceremony must have been, one would suppose, a memorable event; and it is curious that no mention of it is made in his Autobiography, which minutely describes all the other occurrences of his childhood. His ignorance, however, of the exact date of his birth, coupled with the fact that to the last day of his life he looked, and felt, considerably younger than he really was, accounts for the impression under which he lived, and under which his Autobiography was written, that his age was a year or two less than it is shown to have been by the entry in the register of Marylebone Parish. If incurious of the year, he was not indifferent to the month, of his birth. It pleased him to associate his love of spring and youth with the reflection that he was born in May; although it was not among the rural charms ascribed by the courtesy of poets to that generally inclement season that the child's eyes first opened on a world wherein the Maytime of his life was destined to come and go prematurely. The birthplace of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, is in London; and the little house where he was born, No. 31 Baker Street, is now occupied by a milliner's shop. This house, however, lacks the interest common to the birthplaces of eminent men. It represents nothing distinguishable in the local influences which

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## OF THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

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helped to shape the character, and nourish the imagination, of the infant born beneath its roof. The strongest, if not the earliest, impressions made upon his mind by the scenes of his childhood were formed among the sylvan solitudes of the old, and much dilapidated, mansion in Hertfordshire, to which his mother retired shortly after the death of her husband.

The date at which he began to write his Autobiography is not stated on the face of it. There are allusions in it which lead me to believe that he must have written it some time between 1852 and 1855; though I have found among his papers a few autobiographical memoranda dated 1844, and others of apparently earlier date, showing that he had long meditated this account of his life, which carries the story of it to within a few years of his marriage. He himself called it ‘Memoirs of a Literary Life:’ but he did not complete the design implied by this title. The narrative ends before the literary life begins; so that its original title is inapplicable, and, if adopted here, would raise false expectations. I have linked it to my continuation of the record it leaves unfinished, by dividing it into books, and adding headings to the chapters, but in all other respects it is here presented to the reader just as it was written. My own notes on my father’s text are printed within brackets; and whatever else I could collect, to throw light upon that portion of his life comprised within the limits of the Autobiography, is contained in the chapters headed ‘*supplementary*’ or ‘*illustrative*.’

LYTTON.

*Errata.*

Page 3, line 10, *for* seventy-six, *read* seventy-eight.  
 „ 158, last line, „ sixty-four „ sixty-eight.

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BOOK I.

C H I L D H O O D

1803—1811

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## CHAPTER I.

*(Autobiographical.)*

### THE BULWERS.

CHAP.  
 I.

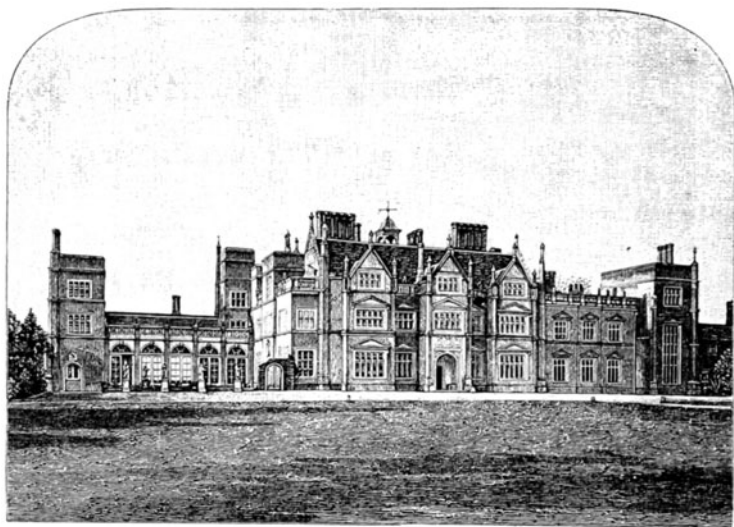
ALL biographies begin by genealogy; and with reason, for many of the influences which sway the destiny that ends not with the grave are already formed before the mortal utters his first wail in the cradle. My paternal family has been settled in Norfolk since the Conquest, and my eldest brother still possesses at Wood Dalling the lands conferred on his ancestor by Aymer de Valence. The name of Bulwer attests the Scandinavian origin of the Norman soldier. For, in its earlier spelling of Bólver, or Bólverk, it occurs as that borne by Sea King and Skald in the chronicles of the Baltic, and forms one of the titles given to Odin himself. The name was, however, apparently known in England before the advent of the great Son of Rou; since, as one of our most erudite antiquarians has remarked, the place called Bulverhithe still speaks of the landing of Bulver the Dane. The county of Norfolk had, previous to the Conquest, been one of the principal establishments of the Anglo-Danish population; and a trifling circumstance connected with the cognomen of my progenitors serves to show how the earlier customs gradually prevailed over those introduced by the conquerors. During the first two or three generations the Bulwers obeyed the Norman fashion, and distinguished themselves by the title of the lands which they held in fief—‘de Dalling;’ but by the fourth generation at latest, though they still held the same

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BOOK I.  
 1803-11

lands, they dropped the French designation derived from their territorial possessions, and returned to the rough name of their Scandinavian fathers, which they have retained to this day. It may here be observed that the case appears to have been common in those parts of England held before the Conquest by an Anglo-Danish proprietary, where we still find that the oldest families have Scandinavian, not Norman, names.

The heirs and descendants of the first Bolver de Dalling subsided by natural degrees into obscure and peaceful squire-



HEYDON HALL.

archs. From generation to generation they ate of the meat and drank of the cup, married, got children, '*et his exactis —obeunt.*'

My great-grandfather married the heiress of the Earles of Heydon Hall, which became the family residence. One of these Earles in a former generation bestowed two livings upon the learned community of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge; which livings are still usually presented to such of the founder's kin as may have received their final education at that venerable