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Lord Lytton: Volume 1
Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton
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The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton

One of the most popular writers of his age, outsold only by Dickens, Edward George Bulwer Lytton (1803–73), first Baron Lytton, is notable for coining the phrases ‘the great unwashed’ and ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’, although his work is largely forgotten today. G.K. Chesterton’s appraisal was that ‘you could not have the Victorian Age without him’. Lytton requested that his son Edward Robert (1831–91), first Earl of Lytton, complete his autobiography. Complemented by letters and previously unpublished material – the better to flesh out the story of a prolific literary life – it appeared in two volumes in 1883. In his preface, Edward Robert writes that his main purpose is ‘to illustrate my father’s works by his life, and his life by his works’. Volume 1 contains the original autobiography, along with letters and selected writings that provide insights into Lytton’s first twenty-two years.

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VOLUME 1

EDWARD ROBERT BULWER LYTTON



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EDWARD BULWER LYTTON
WHEN AN INFANT

From a picture at Hindworth House.

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THE LIFE
LETTERS AND LITERARY REMAINS
OF
EDWARD BULWER, LORD LYTTON

BY
HIS SON

WITH PORTRAITS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

VOL. I.



LONDON
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P R E F A C E .



MY FATHER'S WISHES on the subject of his unpublished manuscripts were conveyed to me in a letter opened after his death. It expressed a hope that the story of his life, which in one of those manuscripts he had left half told, might perhaps be completed by his son. But only in that case was the imperfect record to be published : and it was his desire that by no one else should any biography of him be written.

For the illustration of his life (if I wrote it) I was authorised to employ such of his literary remains as might appear to me suitable for that purpose. I was also at liberty to publish by themselves any others found sufficiently complete for posthumous publication in a separate form. He wished that all unfinished compositions not reserved for either of these uses should be destroyed.

This letter came to me from the grave, with the last and tenderest expressions of an affection which had been the mainstay of my life. It imposed on me no positive obligation except in the contingencies I have mentioned. But the sanctity of a parental injunction was not needed to ensure my devotion to the known wishes of my dearest friend and benefactor.

The unpublished manuscripts bequeathed me by my father (in addition to his private correspondence and note-books) consist of several dramas completely finished ; an entire volume of his 'History of Athens' never published ; a few sketches made for some other historical works ; and an immense number of unfinished novels, plays, poems, and essays.

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Some of these compositions are the produce of the earliest, others of the intermediate, and others again of the very latest, period of his literary life. For, although his life was passed in writing for the public, the fact is abundantly attested by his manuscripts and note-books, that at every period of it he read more than he wrote, and wrote more than he published.

Great as it is, the number of his unpublished writings is not greater than their variety. They are the fragments of more than half a century of assiduous authorship, accompanied by assiduous study, in almost every department of literature: and, notwithstanding their fragmentary character, they constitute, taken together, a tolerably complete expression of their author's personal feelings, his literary theories, and his peculiar methods of imaginative art, at each successive stage of his intellectual development.

Two only of the original compositions left incomplete by him (the unfinished historical romance of 'Pausanias,' and four acts of a play called 'Darnley') were published after his death. All the other manuscripts have been reserved as materials for the present work: and the nature of the materials employed has prescribed the plan adopted.

The most interesting and instructive realities of my father's life were interwoven with his work as an imaginative author. Had he been known to the world only through his connection with politics, there would have been nothing exceptional in his career, and the story of it might have been shortly told. But rarely has a writer of fiction inspired in a wider circle of readers a more legitimately eager curiosity about his inner life and its relation to his outer circumstances.

Traces of the emotions, the sentiments, the passions and affections, the studies and meditations—the excitements of personal action, and the varieties of individual experience—which in turn affected the character, and promoted or retarded

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PREFACE.

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the growth, of his genius, are more or less apparent in all his works. For no man ever wrote more directly out of his own heart. But they are apparent only as reflected lights and shadows from that hidden world into which biography is a voyage of discovery.

The main purpose, therefore, of this book is to illustrate my father's works by his life, and his life by his works. To some extent its general character is rendered different from that of an ordinary biography by the number of unpublished writings (imaginative in what they describe, but singularly biographical in what they reveal) which contribute to the execution of the plan. To prevent, at the outset, misconception on this point, I have called it—not a Life of my father—but his 'Life, Letters, and Literary Remains.'

For the length at which I have entered into details essential to any complete record of the workings of his mind and heart, or to the adequate illustration of what is indirectly autobiographical in the creations of his fancy, I make no apology, for I think that none is needed. Were it requisite to excuse these particulars, the whole book would be inexcusable. It is written in the conviction that my father's life and character present exceptional features, of peculiar interest to those who have already been interested by his works, or for whom the study of human nature has any attraction. If this conviction be unfounded, no modesty in the design, and no brevity in the execution, would atone for the intrinsic insipidity of the subject.

The individuality I have attempted to describe was many-sided. Of a life so long, so variously active and unceasingly laborious, a life touching, at so many different points, literature, society, and politics—and coupled with a character so complex and uncommon—no true picture could be given by a few rapid strokes, however skilfully applied.

It is the chronicle, rather than the history, of a life that I desire to write. In saying this I mean that my object is to place the reader, as he goes along, not so much at an historical distance from the facts narrated, as at the innermost centre of the situations to which those facts belong.

Neither in the portraiture of my father's character, nor in the record of his conduct, have I sought to reduce a single feature, or suppress a single incident, that seems to me less admirable than the rest. His character, indeed, was in all respects so peculiar, and in each so powerfully pronounced, that it would appear unnatural if its nobler attributes were presented to view without any relation to the smaller and less-attractive particulars which, though but an infinitesimal part of it, were often (and more especially in his younger days) mistaken by superficial observers for the whole man.

I have endeavoured to show, in their true proportion and right relation to each other, not only the essential elements, but also the superficial aspects, of a nature which, to a biographer thoroughly familiar with all its idiosyncrasies, affords no excuse for minimising what was little, because it leaves him no power to magnify what was great, in it.

The effort may have fallen short from want of capacity: it has not been restrained by want of candour. Lacking the skill, I have had no temptation from the desire, to paint a fancy portrait. But I am persuaded that if my father's biography is written, as I have tried to write it, honestly and faithfully, no clumsiness on the part of its writer can render it wholly uninteresting, nor even wholly uninteresting. For it is the story of a life in which all the errors were the errors of a good man, and the picture of a character in which all the virtues were those of a great one.

LYTTON.

KNEBWORTH: *November 15, 1883.*

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