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Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

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The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury

In the preface to this three-volume work of 1886, Edwin Hodder (1837–1904) writes that the seventh earl of Shaftesbury ‘resisted every appeal that was made to him to allow his biography to be written.’ In the end, he succumbed to the inevitable, and shared with Hodder, a professional author, both his archives and his memories. Anthony Ashley-Cooper (1801–85) was an evangelical Christian with a profound sense of the duty owed by the aristocracy to their country and to the less fortunate. He first came to prominence as the leader of the parliamentary campaign for shorter working hours, which led to the Factory Act of 1833. Entering the House of Lords on his father's death, he extended his activities, becoming the best-known philanthropist of his age. Volume 1 traces the history of Shaftesbury's family, his early life and marriage, and his work up to 1843.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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VOLUME 1

EDWIN HODDER



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Frontmatter

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Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



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Shaftesbury
ÆTAT 81

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Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

P R E F A C E.



FOR many years Lord Shaftesbury resisted every appeal that was made to him to allow his biography to be written. "No one can do that satisfactorily but myself," he said, "and I have neither the time nor the inclination." Towards the close of his life, however, it became apparent to him that a biography was, to use his own word, "inevitable," and it was then his wish that it should be written with his co-operation. "If the story, such as it is, must be told," he said, "I should like it to be told accurately. That cannot be done unless I furnish the means."

He accordingly placed at my disposal a mass of material, and, in addition, he was good enough to allow me for many months to be in frequent personal communication with him, when, pen in hand, I took down the record of his life as he narrated it. His memory to the very last was surprising, and as the scenes of his earlier life passed before him, he would recall facts and figures, dates and words, with such accuracy, that

although, at his request, I subsequently verified them, it was almost unnecessary to do so.

The conditions imposed upon me were simple and explicit, and were expressed as nearly as possible in these words :—

“I will give you every assistance in my power; place letters, books, and documents in your hands, give you introductions to those who know most about me, and tell you, from time to time, what I can remember of my past history. I will answer any questions and indicate all the sources of information available to you. But I will not read a word of your manuscript, nor pass a sheet for the press. When the book is issued to the public I will, if I am alive, read it, but not till then. All I ask is, that the story of my life be told in its entirety—political, social, domestic, philanthropic, and religious.”

I was aware that Lord Shaftesbury had kept voluminous Diaries, and, from the first, was anxious that these should be placed in my hands. “They are of no value to any one but myself,” was his reply; “they have never been seen by anybody, and they never will be. They are a mass of contradictions; thoughts jotted down as they passed through my mind, and contradicted perhaps on the next page—records of passing events written on the spur of the moment,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

vii

and private details which no one could understand but myself.”

In these circumstances I felt that I could not urge Lord Shaftesbury to entrust them to me, but he promised that he would, if possible, go through them and furnish me with some extracts if he found any that were “worth putting into print.” But neither time nor opportunity came for this; the busy life was busy to the last, and increasing weakness made any effort of this kind impossible.

For six months I continued my work, and in many long and intensely interesting interviews gained much information and many important details of his personal life. But I was conscious that, without the aid of the Diaries, I stood only on the threshold of the subject, and he was conscious of this too. I, therefore, lost no opportunity of urging him to let me have access to them.

In June, 1885, warned by continued failure in health that the end was not far off, Lord Shaftesbury yielded to these entreaties and placed the first volume of his Journals in my hands, promising to let me have the remainder in succession.

“It was never my intention that a page, or a line, should ever be published,” he said to me; “but I have been looking through them again, and I think it is

possible that there are some portions of them that may do good. At all events I do not see how you can perform your task without them, for I cannot give you the personal assistance I could have wished. Besides, all that I could tell you, and much more, is written here, and I must leave it to your discretion to make what use of them you like. You will find they were written in hurried moments, just as thoughts or events arose. They were true at the time, but I may have changed my opinions, or have found afterwards that I had taken a wrong view of things. You are at liberty, of course, to take any view you like of my actions, and to praise or blame them as you will, but do not attempt to represent me as always in the right or you will inevitably break down in your task. You will find that the movements in which I was engaged brought me at times into opposition with all classes, even with those who were working with me, oftentimes with men I loved dearly and greatly admired. I did not seek this opposition; I could not help it; but do not represent me as having been always a man of a cantankerous disposition because of this, unless you find the evidence overwhelming that such was the case. Above all things—and this is one of my strongest motives for placing these volumes in your hands—try to do justice to those who laboured with me. I could never have done the few things I

PREFACE.

ix

have, had I not been supported by true, zealous, earnest men, who gave me their time and their brains to help forward the different movements. My religious views are not popular, but they are the views that have sustained and comforted me all through my life. They have never been disguised, nor have I ever sought to disguise them. I think a man's religion, if it is worth anything, should enter into every sphere of life and rule his conduct in every relation. I have always been, and, please God, always shall be, an Evangelical of the Evangelicals, and no biography can represent me that does not fully and emphatically represent my religious views."

For the selection of the quotations from Lord Shaftesbury's Diaries I am alone responsible. My object has been to make them illustrate, as much as possible, every phase of life and opinion. If it should appear that, in some instances, I have inserted passages which are of too purely a domestic character, I can only plead that I have acted in the spirit of the instructions given to me by Lord Shaftesbury. For example, on one occasion he had been narrating to me some incidents in the life of the late Countess of Shaftesbury, in connection with his factory labours, and lamented how little the factory people knew the extent to which they were indebted to "that blessed

woman," as he called her. Then he spoke of her death. "But you will find it all recorded in the Diaries," he said. "Those entries would be far too private and personal to put into print, would they not?" I asked. "Not at all," he answered, "I should like you to use them. I should wish you to use them. Her memory is far better worth preserving than mine." And then taking down from a shelf in the library the "Shaftesbury Papers," edited by Mr. Christie, he turned to a page in which the First Earl pays a tribute of affection to the wife whose loss he mourns. "There," said he, "that, in my opinion, is the best thing in the book."

In his Diaries Lord Shaftesbury has unconsciously done, what he so often said no one but himself could do satisfactorily—he has "written his own life." It was by a mere accident, however, that the whole of these valuable records were not destroyed. About the year 1880 he was suffering from illness which confined him to the house, and he determined to occupy his enforced leisure, in looking through and burning old papers. The Diaries were consigned to a heap awaiting destruction; but, in the meantime, health returned, the usual daily duties were resumed, and the books and papers were put away to await another pause, and so escaped the threatened fate.

Only a few of the bulky quarto Diaries of Lord

PREFACE.

xi

Shaftesbury, and four of his Journals of Travels, had been placed in my hands, when the news came from Folkestone of the alarming illness which terminated in his death. For the privilege of perusing and making extracts from the remaining volumes, for information supplying the defects of my own personal knowledge, for access to his correspondence, for reading the proofs and examining the extracts from the Diaries with the originals, and for other invaluable aid, I am indebted to the great kindness and courtesy of his son, the Hon. Evelyn Ashley.

Before Lord Shaftesbury gave me the first volume of his Diaries to peruse, he intimated that it would, in his opinion, be of special advantage to me in my labours to have the assistance of some one who, apart from his own family, had known him for many years, and in whose judgment he could repose the fullest confidence. To this end he asked me to place myself in communication with Mrs. Corsbie, the daughter of the late Mr. Alexander Haldane, one of his most intimate friends, with whom for thirty years he had been in almost daily correspondence. To her careful and valuable assistance in reading the proofs for the press, and for the kindness which placed at my disposal the voluminous letters of Lord Shaftesbury to her father, I am under the deepest obligation.

The sources from which much of the information in this work has been drawn have been extremely various, and I have to express my hearty thanks to the Secretaries of Societies with which Lord Shaftesbury was connected; to co-workers with him in various departments of labour; to personal friends and others, who have given me ready access to whole libraries of reports, minutes, pamphlets, and other records, and have rendered me important service in many ways.

It has been my endeavour to let the record of Lord Shaftesbury's whole life-work be told, as much as possible, in his own words; and in doing so I have not added to his opinions or founded conjectures upon his plans. My aim has been to present him as he was; a Christian gentleman first, then a patriot, a statesman, a social reformer, and all that is implied in the word he liked so little—a philanthropist.

“I have no desire whatever to be recorded,” he wrote shortly before his death; “but if I must, sooner or later, appear before the public, I should like the *reality* to be told, be it good, or be it bad, and not a sham.”

I have made no endeavour, therefore, to tone down his strong Protestantism; his unshaken and unshakable belief in Scripture, in dogma, and in prayer. If he was wrong here, he was wrong throughout, for he was a

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Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*PREFACE.*

xiii

man with a single aim ; his labours in the field of politics sprang from his philanthropy ; his philanthropy sprang from his deep and earnest religious convictions ; and every labour, political, benevolent, and religious, was begun, continued, and ended in one and the same spirit.

E. H.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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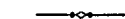
978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.

ANCESTRY AND HOME.

	PAGE
The Coopers and the Ashleys—Anthony Ashley Cooper—His College Days and Marriage—Sketch of his Career—Raised to the Peerage—Made Lord High Chancellor—Committed to the Tower—The Habeas Corpus Act—Indicts the Duke of York as a Popish Recusant—Flies to Holland—Death—Various Estimates of his Character—The Second Earl—Education entrusted to John Locke—Letter from his Son—The Third Earl—Author of the “Characteristics”—Nature of his Philosophy—The Fourth Earl—Handel—Fifth and Sixth Earls—St. Giles’s House, the Hereditary Seat of the Ashleys—The Park and Pleasure Grounds—St. Giles’s Church—Its Monuments—Almshouses—Village of Wimborne St. Giles	13

CHAPTER II.

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YEARS.

Birth—Home Influences—Maria Millis—The First Prayer—Dawn of Religious Life—Manor-House School, Chiswick—Harsh Treatment—His First Great Grief—Mistaken Views of Education—A Sad Childhood—Removed to Harrow—New Influences—State of his Mind on Religious Questions—First Visit to St. Giles’s House—Love of Country Scenes—Cranborne Chase—A Strange Scene at Harrow—Determines to Espouse the Cause of the Poor—An Autobiographical Fragment—Oxford—Takes First-Class in Classics—Extracts from an Early Diary—“Fugitive and Desultory Notes”—Elected Member for Woodstock at age of Twenty-five—Birthday Thoughts—In France—Supports the King’s Government—Canning’s Eloquence—Letter from Mrs. Canning—Friendship with the Duke of Wellington—Early Labours in Parliament—“Cursed with Honourable Desires”—Diary—Self-depreciation—Change of Ministry—Canning, Premier—Place Offered—Office Declined—Grounds of Refusal—State of Political Affairs—At Strathfieldsaye—Letter from Duke of Wellington—Death of Canning—In Wales—Studies Welsh—Misgivings as to Public Career—Letter from Lord Bathurst—

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Wellington, Head of New Administration—Appointed Commissioner of India Board of Control—Suttee—Schemes for the Welfare of India—Catholic Emancipation—Desires to Devote his Life to Science—Called to Another Career	35

CHAPTER III.

1828—1833.

Treatment of Lunatics—State of the Lunacy Laws—Mr. Robert Gordon—First Important Speech in Parliament—Diary—Letter from Lord Bathurst—Appointed Commissioner in Lunacy—Investigation into State of Asylums—Efforts in Literature—Work for India—Bishop Heber—With the King—Works of Charity—Forgiveness—Scientific Pursuits—Family Affairs—Astronomy and Sir James South—Catholic Disabilities—Foreshadowings of Future Career—Self-depreciation and Despondency—Robert Southey—Elected Member for Dorchester—Marries Emily, Daughter of the Fifth Earl Cowper—Successfully Contests Dorset—Election Expenses in 1831—Correspondence with Duke of Wellington—Petition Against the Dorset Election—Pecuniary Embarrassments—Letter from Ernest, Duke of Cumberland—A Second Triumph—Letter from Mr. Follett—Letters from Southey—Condition of the Working Classes—State of the Times—Sir Robert Peel's Policy—Cotton Supply and Manufacture—Progress of Inventions—Condition of the Lancashire Operatives—Child-Jobbers and Child Labour—The Apprentices System—Outline of Early Factory Legislation—Michael Thomas Sadler, M.P. for Newark—Newark Disfranchised—Mr. Sadler Loses his Seat in Parliament—Lord Ashley becomes Leader in the Factory Agitation—The Parting of the Ways—Correspondence with Lord Morpeth—Pays Tribute to Mr. Sadler and other Labourers—States his Views on the Factory System—Explains Principles on which the Agitation shall be Conducted—Letter from Mr. J. R. McCulloch—Opposition of Master Manufacturers—Address of the Operatives of England and Scotland—Report of Commission of Inquiry—Introduces Bill to Limit Hours of Labour “for Women and Young Persons” to Ten Hours a Day—Opposition of Lord Althorp—Bill Defeated, but Principle Established that Labour and Education should be Combined .	90
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

ITALY—1833.

First Travel—Diary—Plains of Burgundy—Jura Mountains—Geneva—Protestant and Papal Switzerland—Brieg—The Simplon—Milan—High Mass in Cathedral—A Retrospect—Venice—Her Sun Set—Bologna—The Republic of San Marino—A Wayside Accident—Rome—St. Peter's—The Forum and Coliseum—St. John Lateran—Guido's Aurora—The Shortest Day—Christmas Eve—Ceremonies at St. Peter's	
--	--

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

xvii

	PAGE
—Te Deum at the Gesù—St. Agostino—Catacombs—Pusey and Bunsen	
—Viterbo—Siena—Florence—Sardinia—Nice—A “ Kingdom of Italy ”	
—Home	170

CHAPTER V.

1834—1838.

Diary Resumed—Letter from Southey—A Stormy Political Horizon—Alma Mater—Installation of Duke of Wellington as Chancellor—Introspection—Change of Ministry—A Note-Book of Passing Events—Correspondence with Sir Robert Peel—Appointed a Lord of the Admiralty—Painstaking Diligence—A Short-lived Ministry—Church Reform—Tercentenary of the Reformation—The Church Pastoral Aid Society Founded—Difficulties Concerning it—Factory Act of 1833 in Operation—Trials from Friends—Letter from Mr. Richard Oastler—Harassed by Fruitless Correspondence—The Ten Hours Agitation Grows—Mr. Poulett Thompson’s Bill—Opposed and Withdrawn—Mr. Charles Hindley’s Bill—A Pledge from the Government—Richard Cobden and Factory Legislation—“ Deluded and Mocked ” by the Government—Factory Question Actively Resumed—An Able Speech—Letter from Charles Dickens—Word-Portrait of Lord Ashley in 1838 . 194

CHAPTER VI.

1838—1839.

Commencement of Diaries—Lord Melbourne—Lockhart’s Life of Scott—Appointment of Vice-Consul at Jerusalem—Lord Lindsay’s Travels—A Case in Lunacy—Success of Pastoral Aid Society—At Windsor Castle—Progress of Science—Heresy in High Feather—Letter from Lord Melbourne—The State and Prospects of the Jews—Religious and Political Action in Jerusalem—Letter from Sir Robert Peel—Fall of the Melbourne Administration—Sir Robert Peel Sent for—The “ Bedchamber Question ”—Appointment in Royal Household offered to Lord Ashley—Peel urges its Acceptance—Attempt to Form a Ministry Fails—Lord Melbourne Recalled—Board of Education, consisting of a Committee of the Privy Council, Appointed—Letter and Memorandum from Duke of Wellington—Lord Stanley’s Motion to Revoke the Order in Council—Supported by Lord Ashley—The Measure Attacked as Adverse to the Constitution, and as Hostile to the Church and to Revealed Religion—Lord Stanley’s Amendment Lost—The Establishment of the Committee of Council on Education 230

CHAPTER VII.

SCOTLAND—1839.

The Bull Ring, Birmingham—Poverty and Luxury in Liverpool—Boldness—The Slave Trade—Southey—Carlisle—Afternoon Service—Sir Walter Scott—The Poet Crabbe—Architecture of Kirks—Churches,

A

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Ancient and Modern—Extempore Prayer—Edinburgh Castle—Annals of Scotland—In the Trossachs—Melancholy without Despondency—Charm of Scott's Genius—Rossie—The Northern Lights—The Curse of Gowrie—Dunkeld—Fanaticism of Early Reformers—Gaelic Life—The System of Gleaning—Descendants of Prince Charles Edward—Oban—Scotch Architects—Glasgow Factories—Dr. Macleod—Rev. Robert Montgomery—Blindness—In Courts and Alleys—Sir Archibald Alison—Cora Linn—Chillingham—Red Deer and Wild Cattle—The Duchess of Northumberland—Ravenworth—Van Mildert, Bishop of Durham—Fountains Abbey—Ripon Cathedral—Newby—York—Cathedral Services—Castle Howard—Chatsworth—Haddon Hall—Home—Letter from Daniel Webster—An Estrangement—Marriage of Lord Palmerston to Lady Cowper—Happy Close of the Year	256

CHAPTER VIII.

1840.

Announcement of the Queen's Marriage—A Magistrate—The Old Story Renewed—The only Conservative Principle—Marriage of the Queen—Letter from Daniel Webster—Attempt upon the Queen's Life—Church Extension—Chimney Sweeps—Early Legislation—Various Acts for Protection of Climbing Boys—Lord Ashley Takes up the Question—Mr. Stevens—Labours In and Out of the House—Law Suits as "Test" Cases—A Rescued Boy—Progress of the Factory Movement—Mr. Oastler—Appointment of a Select Committee—Children not Protected by the Factory Acts—Commission Granted to Inquire into the Employment of Children—The Syrian Question—Mehemet Ali and Ibrahim Pasha—Prospects of the Jewish People—Efforts for their Protection—Return to their Own Land—Conflict with France Anticipated—Memorandum to Lord Palmerston—The "Bear" Ellice—Thiers and Guizot—Fall of Acre—At Broadlands—Article in <i>Quarterly</i> on "Infant Labour"—Socialism and Chartism	287
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

1841.

Indifference of the Clergy—Sympathy with the Poor—Practical Christianity—Progress of Children's Employment Commission—The Second Chamber—Lord Morpeth's Registration Bill (Ireland)—Admissibility of Jews to Municipal Offices—The Duke of Wellington—Anecdotes—The Seminary of St. Sulpice—Protestantism the Great Force of Conservatism—A Dissolution Threatened—Sir Robert Peel's "No Confidence" Motion—Ascot—Oxford Commemoration—Parliament Dissolved—General Election—Speech to Electors of Dorset—Letter to Sir R. Peel—Tour of Inspection in Lancashire—A Mill-Hand at Stockport—Sir Robert Peel Offers an Appointment in Royal Household—The	
--	--

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

xix

	PAGE
Offer Declined—Middle Courses Proposed—Letter to Central Short-time Committee—Offer of Appointment in Prince Albert's Household—Declined—Letter from Rev. E. Bickersteth—The New Ministry—Illness of Bickersteth—Drainage and Ventilation Bills—Letter from Colonel Napier—M. Cornelius—The Jerusalem Bishopric—Frederick William IV. of Prussia—Dr. Bunsen—Outline of his Special Mission—Progress of the Negotiations—Correspondence with the King of Prussia—The Bill for Creating the Bishopric Passes—Enthusiasm and Opposition—The Druses—Consecration of Bishop Alexander—The Episcopal Benediction—The Bishop Sails for Jaffa—Lord Ashley's Power of Reading Men—Anecdote of First Earl of Shaftesbury—The Cripple Dodds	325

CHAPTER X.

1842.

Tractarianism—Oxford Professorship of Poetry—Letter to Mr. Roundell Palmer—Rev. Isaac Williams and Rev. James Garbett—Letters from Hon. William Cowper, Rev. E. Bickersteth, and "Charlotte Elizabeth"—A Suggested Compromise—Correspondence with Rev. Dr. Pusey and Rev. John Keble—Letter from Archdeacon Wilberforce—Result of the Contest—A Rebuke—The King of Prussia in England—Address of the Jews' Society—Correspondence with Sir Robert Peel—His Hostility to Factory Bill—Announcement to Short-time Committees—Principle in Government and Opposition—A Socialist Ally—Bishop Alexander's Entry into Jerusalem—Election Committees—Report on Mines and Collieries—Public Indignation Aroused—Terrible Disclosures—The System Exposed—A Great Speech—Richard Cobden and the Philanthropists—Cobden Alters his Estimate of Lord Ashley's Character—Lord Palmerston's Support—Letter from Prince Albert—No Peer to take Charge of Bill—Victory—Trade Depression and Riots—Tour through Manufacturing Districts—The Duchess of Beaufort and Sir Robert Peel—China and Afghanistan	386
---	-----

CHAPTER XI.

1843.

Apprehensions—The "Repeal Year"—Daniel O'Connell—Afghanistan—The Gates of Somnauth—Lord Ellenborough's Proclamation—Pious Slave-holders—Assassination of Mr. Edward Drummond—Correspondence with Sir Robert Peel thereon—Troubled State of Country—Second Report of Children's Employment Commission—Nature of its Revelations—Need of Education among the Working Classes—An Address to the Crown thereon—A Remarkable Speech—Factory Education Bill Proposed by Government—Opposition of Dissenters—The Bill Amended and ultimately Withdrawn—The Opium Question—The	
--	--

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07553-4 - The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury: Volume 1

Edwin Hodder

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Indo-Chinese Opium Trade—First Great Indictment of the Opium Trade in Parliament—Arguments used—Motion Withdrawn—Opinions upon the Speech—Estimate of Characters of Sir Robert Peel, Lord John Russell, and Sir James Graham—State of the Poor of London—Field Lane Ragged School—A Disreputable Locality and its Traditions—Co-operation of Charles Dickens—A Novel Practice in the Church—Pews and Pew-rents—Birthday Reflections—Opposition to Collieries Bill—At'Brocket—Riots in Manchester—Movements in the Churches—Pusey Interdicted from Preaching—Letter from Elizabeth Fry—A Foreign Tour—Antwerp—Aix-la-Chapelle—Bavaria—Carlsbad—Prague—Vienna—Visits to Philanthropic Institutions—Continental Sundays—Linz—Ratisbon—Nuremberg—Wurtemberg—Heidelberg—Frankfort—Domestic Life—Russia—Lord Ashley's Philanthropy Attacked—Miss Harriet Martineau—Speech at Sturminster on Condition of Agricultural Labourer—Consequences—The Nestorian Christians—Correspondence with Lord Aberdeen	443