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Edited by George Earle Buckle

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The Letters of Queen Victoria

This nine-volume selection from the letters of Queen Victoria, with ancillary material, was commissioned by her son, Edward VII, and published between 1907 and 1932, with a gap of almost twenty years between the third and fourth volumes. The editor of the 'Third Series', which covers the years from 1886 to 1901, was George Earle Buckle (1854–1935), a historian and former editor of *The Times*, who continued the editorial policy of his predecessors, but who needed to tread carefully, as many of the people mentioned in documents of the final part of Queen Victoria's reign were still alive when Volumes 7–9 were published between 1930 and 1932. Volume 7 covers the period 1886–90, which was dominated by Gladstone's 'new departure in Irish policy'. Other topics include the Golden Jubilee of 1887 and the tragic early death of Victoria's son-in-law, Emperor Frederick III of Germany, in 1888.

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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108077828

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2014

This edition first published 1930

This digitally printed version 2014

ISBN 978-1-108-07782-8 Paperback

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A SELECTION FROM HER MAJESTY'S
CORRESPONDENCE AND JOURNAL BETWEEN
THE YEARS 1886 AND 1901

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF
HIS MAJESTY THE KING

EDITED BY GEORGE EARLE BUCKLE
EDITOR OF THE SECOND SERIES

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

1886–1890

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1930

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07782-8 - The Letters of Queen Victoria: Volume 7: 1886–1890

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Cambridge University Press

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PREFACE

THIS volume begins a Third and final Series of *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, selected, under the authority of his Majesty the King, from the vast stores of the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle, and supplemented under the same authority by extracts from Queen Victoria's Journal. The last fifteen years of her Majesty's reign were so full of events of general and national importance, and the amount of material relating to them in the Archives is so overwhelming; the Queen herself, despite her age, took such a remarkably active part and interest in affairs down to within a few days of her death; the period is so comparatively recent, and, although the principal actors, with one exception,¹ are dead, so attractively fresh in the memory of the older generation, that it has been found advisable, in this Third Series, to allot five years, instead of an average of eight, to each volume. The present volume, accordingly, carries us down to the close of 1890; two more volumes, bringing the scheme to an end with the Queen's life, are in active preparation. It will be noticed that the correspondence of the opening year, 1886, occupies two chapters, the first a very long one. The reason is, of course, that the year is of quite exceptional importance, as all the domestic politics of the period 1886–

¹ The Emperor William II has kindly expressed his willingness that a selection from his correspondence with the Queen during the years 1888 to 1900 should be included in this Third Series of *The Letters of Queen Victoria*.

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1900, and the relations therein of the Queen to her Ministers, were governed by the new departure in Irish policy taken in that year by Mr. Gladstone. Chapter I contains by itself the story, as told in the Royal correspondence, of the first Home Rule Bill and of the short-lived Government which proposed it.

The nature and scope of the whole undertaking of *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, as conceived under King Edward's authority by Dr. Arthur Benson and the 2nd Viscount Esher, and continued by the present Editor under the authority of King George, are by this time generally understood and appreciated. But, to prevent any possible misapprehension, it may be pointed out that, throughout each Series, the documents and extracts are chosen with the view of illustrating the character and achievement of the great Queen; her influence upon, and her reaction to, the public events and social movements of her time; and her relations with contemporary rulers abroad, and with the eminent men who became in succession her chief Ministers at home. The documents are left to tell their own tale, without comment or criticism; Introductory Notes and Footnotes being supplied merely to assist the comprehension of readers with no special knowledge of the period.

Every effort is made to bring out all Queen Victoria's distinctive qualities and opinions; not only those which manifest her greatness, but also those which reveal her limitations. Incidentally, fresh light of course is thrown on the character of her correspondents. The letters which passed between her Majesty and her Ministers are treated in one and the same fashion, whether the Minister was a man in whom she had especial confidence or one of whose policy she disapproved. In every case, while docu-

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ments already published are not as a rule reproduced, a representative selection is given from the letters of the Minister as well as from those of the Queen ; and in many cases it is the letters of the Minister which are presented in larger number and at greater length. Moreover, the present Editor, like his predecessors, has hitherto had the satisfaction of feeling, when the documents under his control are silent or conditions of space prove inexorable, that there exist, in regard to almost every statesman concerned, standard and easily accessible works (often referred to in the notes) in which the statesman's point of view is fully explained. For the period on which we are now entering books of this character are not as yet so numerous ; but in any case *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, First, Second, and Third Series alike, must inevitably concentrate on depicting the personality of Queen Victoria.

The conditions of her Majesty's life during the final period did not differ materially from those described in the Preface to the Second Series. Though her excursions to London were more frequent and longer, they were still only occasional ; and—with the exception of the substitution (after 1886) for the spring visit to Osborne of a regular sojourn for about a month in the South of Europe—her yearly routine of residence between Windsor, Osborne, and Balmoral scarcely varied. The approach of old age did not lessen her steady, day-by-day application to her duties as a Constitutional Monarch ; while the maturity of her judgment and the wider range of her experience gave increased weight and authority to her decisions. Moreover, in spite of a growing tendency to rheumatism, which ultimately caused her, even indoors, to be ordinarily moved about in a chair,

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she accomplished, to her people's gratification, a larger number of Court ceremonies, State visits, and public functions than in her middle life. Though all her sons and daughters were married, and one daughter and one son were dead, a new domestic circle, in which she delighted, sprang up around her in the children of Princess Beatrice and Prince Henry of Battenberg, who, in accordance with her wish, made her house their home. The years brought many grievous family sorrows; but they brought also a steadily increasing popularity and affection, and immense public confidence in her Majesty's sagacity and goodness, not merely throughout Great Britain, but very conspicuously among the peoples of the outer Empire—popularity, affection and confidence which culminated in two unprecedented celebrations, the Jubilees of 1887 and 1897.

EDITORIAL NOTE

AMONG those to whom the Editor's thanks are due for assistance in preparing this volume, the outstanding name is once more that of Lord Stamfordham, who steadfastly carries on under King George the traditions learnt under Queen Victoria; his constant support and discriminating criticism have been invaluable. Since the issue of Volume III of the Second Series there has been a change in the direction both of the Royal Archives and of the publishing house of John Murray; but the Editor is equally indebted to the Rev. Albert Lee, who has retired from the Recordership of the Royal Archives, and to his successor, Miss Mackenzie, for ever-ready and expert aid; and Lieut.-Colonel Murray has shown the same keenness and helpfulness over the proofs as his lamented father, Sir John Murray. The death of Lord Esher, following upon that of Sir John Murray, has severed the last personal link between the First Series and its successors; but both men lived long enough to give valuable counsel by which readers of the Third Series will profit.

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