

THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD

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The Earl of Beaconsfield by Harold E. Gorst

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HAROLD E. GORST

**THE EARL OF
BEACONSFIELD**

The Victorian Era Series

The Earl of Beaconsfield

The
Earl of Beaconsfield

By
HAROLD E. GORST
Author of "China"

LONDON
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1900

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Preface

It would be impossible, within the limits of a single volume, to record every event in Disraeli's career. The chief aim, therefore, in writing the following pages has been to trace the political development of the Conservative statesman in broad outline; and to arrange the important incidents of his life in proper perspective, in order that the reader, instead of being confused by a multitude of facts, may derive some kind of impression—however inadequately the idea may have been carried out—of the great part which Disraeli has played in the history of the British empire.

Since the appearance of the existing biographies of Lord Beaconsfield, fresh light has been thrown upon an incident in his career by the recent publication, amongst the private papers of Sir Robert Peel, of a letter addressed by Disraeli to Peel in 1841. It will be remembered that Disraeli, in 1846, denied having asked Peel for office five years before; and on that account the letter in question has been generally regarded as affording proof of a mean and dishonourable action on his part. I have submitted this letter to a high legal authority, and he at once pointed out to me the fact that Disraeli made no direct application for a post in the government. It is rather remarkable that other legal minds, who

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have discussed the subject, should not have alighted upon this simple explanation of Disraeli's naturally indignant denial when he was accused of doing what he had carefully and purposely avoided. Both the letter and its explanation find a place in this volume, and no doubt the unprejudiced reader will readily adopt the latter, in preference to tarnishing the otherwise spotless reputation of a statesman to whom the present generation owes a deep debt of gratitude.

The Conservative victory of 1874 has often been alluded to as the result of a great Conservative reaction, or of a wave of imperialism passing through the country. These inspiring phrases are unfortunately far removed from the truth; and it is equally misleading to attribute the defeat of 1880 to a revulsion of feeling against Lord Beaconsfield's foreign policy. The fact is, that the masses of the electorate enfranchised by the bill of 1867 (or at any rate a large proportion of them) know and care nothing about questions of foreign policy, and are equally indifferent to general matters touching domestic legislation. Political feeling is only evoked when the private interests of the individual are directly interfered with. The passions of the thirsty mechanic are aroused to the highest pitch when an extra duty is imposed upon his favourite beverage; but he does not care twopence about Russia's advance in Central Asia, and takes no interest in educational problems which agitate only a handful of genuine reformers. The causes of the victory which placed Disraeli in power with a majority for the first time, and of the defeat which hurled him from the great position that he had attained during

his term of office, are dealt with plainly and, perhaps, prosaically; but the conclusion in each case is based upon the authority of those who were in the best position to form an accurate judgment.

My father enjoyed considerable political intimacy with Disraeli from the year 1870. I am indebted to him for information that could not have been obtained elsewhere; but it would be most undutiful of me to neglect to exonerate him from all responsibility regarding any political opinions which may be expressed in the following pages. An acknowledgment is due to the great services rendered by Mr. Ewald in collecting, for the purposes of his work on the life and times of Lord Beaconsfield, the speeches delivered by the Conservative statesman both in and out of Parliament; and I have also to tender acknowledgments to the proprietors of the *Times*, and to Messrs. P. S. King & Son, the proprietors of *Hansard's Debates*, for special permission to reprint extracts from their reports of Lord Beaconsfield's speeches.

HAROLD E. GORST.

LONDON, 1899.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<i>CHAPTER I</i>	
<i>Early Influences</i> - - - - -	<i>I</i>
<i>CHAPTER II</i>	
<i>Parliamentary Debut</i> - - - - -	<i>13</i>
<i>CHAPTER III</i>	
<i>Young England</i> - - - - -	<i>23</i>
<i>CHAPTER IV</i>	
<i>Opportunity</i> - - - - -	<i>28</i>
<i>CHAPTER V</i>	
<i>Office</i> - - - - -	<i>40</i>
<i>CHAPTER VI</i>	
<i>Lord Derby's Blunder</i> - - - - -	<i>52</i>
<i>CHAPTER VII</i>	
<i>The Second Derby Government</i> - - - - -	<i>63</i>
<i>CHAPTER VIII</i>	
<i>Gladstone's Franchise Bill</i> - - - - -	<i>71</i>
<i>CHAPTER IX</i>	
<i>Disking the Whigs</i> - - - - -	<i>84</i>
<i>CHAPTER X</i>	
<i>Household Suffrage</i> - - - - -	<i>95</i>
<i>CHAPTER XI</i>	
<i>Prime Minister</i> - - - - -	<i>106</i>
(M 616)	<i>b</i>