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LITERATURE.

The Life of Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, K.G., &c. By Stanley Lane-Poole. (Longmans.)

(First Notice.)

IN treating with more than the normal biographer's ability the life of a man famous throughout Europe in his day, and not yet forgotten, Mr. S. Lane-Poole is to be congratulated upon the skilful and successful *mécanique* of his last two large volumes. The basis consists of the memoirs (in pica); an autobiography begun about the diplomatist's eightieth year, and continued till his ninety-second. The superstructure (in bourgeois) consists of extracts from F. O. despatches, numbering some 15,000; of private correspondence with family, friends, and colleagues; and of personal details contributed by survivors now veterans, with an occasional note in briefer, the whole bearing chiefly upon diplomatic work. Each page carries a marginal date of the composition, together with the age of the autobiographer, and a numeral reference to the document or paper. In his running commentary the editor has subordinated, with much sobriety and no little art, his own style to the somewhat ambiguous "rounded periods" and the "finished, often too stately, language" of the autobiographer. This is evidently no ideal biography; but, as *documents pour servir*, the work has its own especial merit, and the keynote is struck in the opening sentence:

"Three statues stand side by side in Westminster Abbey: they represent George Canning, the minister; his son Charles, Earl Canning, first viceroy of India; and his cousin, Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe."

The diplomatist's mother, a woman worthy of a remarkable son, was Mehitabel Patrick, the daughter of a well-to-do Dublin merchant; and to this blood we must attribute a Hibernian pugnacity of disposition, backed and strengthened by the "bottom" of the sturdy old Canynoges, burghers of Bristol. The future ambassador dated his birth from November 4, 1786; and he came into the world with a silver spoon in his mouth, as the popular saying has it. His cousin, "the great Canning" (for so the ambassador

called him to the last), was rising at the Treasury. Fox, Sheridan, and other notables, were warm friends of the widow, who, bravely but unsuccessfully, carried on the banking business; and "Stratty," after the slavery of a preparatory school at Hackney, was sent as King's scholar at nine to Eton. Here it took him ten years to pass through the various grades till he became "captain." He did not disdain athletics; he laid in a fair stock of classics for quotation—then the dreary fashion of Englishmen; he fixed and formulated his views and ideas, e.g., "the ignorant speed of steam"; and, though somewhat parlous, puritanical, and priggish, he made sundry life-long friendships. He also wrote a prologue (i. 18), and cultivated an English style, which began with being Johnsonian and Grandsonian and gradually became a notable echo of Gibbon (i. 61-68), often injured, moreover, by too scrupulous correction.

From King's College, Cambridge—where the youth "had nothing to do with horses, carriages, or boats"—he was appointed, while yet in his nonage, *précis*-writer at the Foreign Office, and then second Secretary to Copenhagen. His undergraduate life and his Downing Street clerkship were finally killed by his transfer to Mr. Robert Adair's Constantinople mission. Here fortune began to open upon him the budget of her favours. The Turk of the ancient *régime*, who is roundly abused (i. 42) as "proud, ignorant, crafty, jealous, cruel, cringing, bullying, cheating," was then officially at war with us, but inclined peacewards, because England began to prove herself victorious in the Peninsula. So the Treaty of the Dardanelles was signed (Jan. 5, 1809), and the Secretary of Embassy, at the ripe age of twenty-two, received from his "illustrious cousin" the dormant appointment of minister plenipotentiary, which awoke to vigorous life during the next year. It was presently followed by an annual pension of £1200—worth in those days thrice its present value.

To this unprecedented success, as the biographer candidly admits (i. 80), must be attributed much of the ambassador's domineering spirit, impetuosity, arrogance, and impatience of contradiction. Instead of toiling up the steep, and learning patience and *savoir faire*, he had sprung at once to the summit; and even this did not satisfy him. He had no "predilections for diplomacy"—the only walk of life for which he was fitted. His youthful conceit pined for the social and intellectual pleasures of London; for the clever anti-Jacobin's career of home-office; for the House of Commons, in which he ever figured as a mere mediocrity; and for literature, whereby as a penny-a-liner he would have starved. And this radical mistake of his own powers, which the elder Canning, his senior by sixteen years, was far too clever to incur or to encourage, lasted him to the last. I have heard him repeat what is affirmed in the *Memoirs* (i. 69), even during the later days of the Crimean War. He also complained bitterly of inactivity and over-leisure at the "vile hole, the *infâme trou*"—Stambul; and apparently it never entered his mind that a knowledge of Romic would have bred familiarity with classical Greek, that Italian would have aided

Latin, and that Turkish, Persian, and Arabic would have added much to his local influence. But the fad of the day was to spoil reams of paper and to be as English as possible by virtue of ignoring the world abroad. And did not Clive declare that had he been as familiar with the "native lingo" as his fellow officials he would have been as egregiously cheated by Hindu chicanery?

Canning's long career of minister plenipotentiary to the Sublime Porte opened with some minor successes. By "not using a lower tone" he bullied the Rais Efendi (foreign secretary) into abating the nuisance of French privateering, alias piracy, in friendly waters; and the Turk could only complain impotently that "the business of a conference should not be interrupted by raising the voice, or by showing at one time a ruddy face and at another a yellow one." This is explained by Sir Henry A. Layard (*Early Adventures*, ii. 374), when describing his chief some thirty years afterwards: "His thin compressed lips denoted a violent and passionate temper; his complexion was so transparent that the least emotion, whether of pleasure or anger, was at once shown by its varying tints," added to which he already displayed "a somewhat too evident assumption of dignity and reserve." While obtaining the *firman* against privateering he was visited by sundry notables, including Byron ("our noble bard," but not an Etonian) and Lady Hester Stanhope, who, with stinging truth, described her host as "full of zeal but full of prejudice"; "both a religious and a political methodist"; "best fitted to be the commander-in-chief at home and ambassador extraordinary abroad to the various societies for the suppression of vice and cultivation of patriotism"; while she charged him with falling into "greater convulsions than the dervishes at the mention of Buonaparte" (i. 117). The spirited caricature, almost the only amusing passage in the work, so irritated his Excellency that he condescended to elaborate explanations; and, needless to say that he and her eccentric ladyship, who had grasped her nettle—the best and only way to treat it—were good friends ever afterwards.

This opening to the life-long drama ended in the Treaty of Bucharest (May, 1812), which limited Russia to the Pruth and restored Serbia to the Porte. Canning always held it to be his earliest and greatest diplomatic triumph, binding Russia and Turkey ("rotten at heart" as she was) to the interests of England. The pragmatical plenipotentiary was assisted by the fact that for two years he received no political instructions from home. Such neglect of his high and mighty personality, of course, made him furious, and more so when the credit was assigned by the Duke of Wellington to his own *sainéant* brother. But the object of the "incompetent administration" was clear—to score in case of success, and should failure occur to have a scapegoat ready to slip. Moreover, the government trusted its representative despite his twenty-three years, and showed their confidence by not tying his hands. What a contrast between those days, when the "discretionary powers of a diplomatist" were duly recognised, and our times of "telegraphic ambassadors" and a prepotential "clerkery"!—

The treaty gained for Canning the thanks

* Two vols., pp. 519+475=994. Vol. i., preface, pp. xiv. + list of contents, pp. xv.; vol. ii., contents, pp. xviii., and index (of names), pp. 7—the latter is utterly inadequate for facility of reference. There are three portraits of Canning: the frontispiece, act. 29 (Robertson), attractive and promising; Mrs. Canning with her babe, truly charming (Romney); and Viscount Stratford (George Richmonds), more formidable than necessary. The page of handwriting (i. 96), small and neat, shows the scholar, the student, differing materially from the scrawl of the man of the world and the big pithooks and hangers of the model F. O. despatch.

of Czar Alexander, with the usual snuff-box; and the first mission, which was one, long tussle with France, ended after four years, charge being made over to easy-going Mr. Robert Liston. During the subsequent two years he threw himself into home politics with the countenance of his brilliant cousin. He was constant at Grillon's, courted Miss Milbanke, and frequented M^{de}. de Staël. He also aided in establishing the *Quarterly*, which has long since degenerated into an organ for private advertising; he "dallied with the muse"; discovered that "books impart knowledge and amuse the mind"—a fair specimen of his pompous commonplace—and printed anonymously "Buonaparte; A Poem," here given *in extenso* (i. 215). The exordium—

"Chieftains! to whom—nor distant is the day
Aright if Fancy dream, nor hope betray—
Attendant still on Conquest's gory path,
Just Heaven shall delegate the sword of
wrath!"—
may give the measure of this "copy of verses."

After a visit to France under the Allies, where he saw *Le Roi* make his entry into Paris, and met his future foe, Nicholas, in 1814 he was made minister plenipotentiary to the Helvetic Confederacy. In Switzerland he was utterly off his *assiette*. He had little to do after attending, by order of Lord Castlereagh, the Congress of Vienna. He began by finding the present playground of Europe a "blend of Elysium and Mahomet's Seventh Heaven." But he ever hated compulsory residence; his nature was restless and unquiet; with him contentment was the dream and ambition the realism of life; and he soon learned to loathe "rustic diplomacy" and its *mise-en-scène*. The "Hundred Days" had made it easy for the Cantons to accept the Federal Compact recommended by the Congress, and had stultified a "grand coalition against Napoleon." During his leave of absence in England (1816) he married Harriet Raikes; and, in the course of the next year, buried her and her baby in the cathedral of Lausanne, where the massive monument by Canova is still shown with pride, one of the few ornaments of a temple so "protestantised" that it suggests a huge barn.

After five years of residence and touring, Canning turned his back upon Helvetia and returned to England, *via* Turin, where he thoroughly misunderstood the king. His next mission was to the United States, under promise of a G.C.B.-ship if he could "keep those schoolboy Yankees quiet." After the usual rest of hard work in the London season, he set out (1819) for a post where the only labour was the maintenance of friendly relations and preserving the peace between mother and daughter, and where "such native luxuries as soft crab and cakes made of Indian corn opened a new field to the curious appetite" (i. 298). During his three years at Washington, then "the unpromising germ of a city," he had some business with the Secretary of State, rough old John Quincy Adams, whom he describes as "domineering," and for whose "irritation" and "sensitive temper" an excuse is found in the climate, whereas Mr. Secretary (*Memoirs*, vi. 157) explains it far more reasonably:

"He is a proud, high-tempered Englishman

with a disposition to be overbearing; which I have often been compelled to check in its own way. He is, of all the foreign ministers with whom I have had occasion to treat, the man who has most tried my temper. As a diplomatic man his chief want is suppleness, and his great virtue is sincerity."

Canning in the United States *could* keep his temper; and this fact suggests that its violent outbreaks were mostly calculated, while he confesses to the highest respect for "a tremendous passion occasionally" (i. 246). "But while we may excuse an occasional infirmity, we have scant respect for the man who affects it. The envoy, however, had the good sense to own that his "residence in America was a second and rougher period of education"; and, after a tour through the States and a glimpse at Canada, he returned to England in 1823.

The *far niente* of an American mission was succeeded by an embassy to Constantinople. Here the question of the day was the establishment of a Greek kingdom at the expense of the Porte—a measure regarded as impracticable by the great cousin. His second visit was a failure, for which the blame was laid upon Russia. Other work was to be found for him in the shape of a temporary mission to St. Petersburg. At Vienna he had an interview with Prince Metternich, who seems generally to have been sympathetic, although the colloquy began with "You have a bug on your sleeve" (i. 349). The overland journey through Poland was detestable; but the reception by the Czar and Count Nesselrode was as friendly as could be expected, considering the triangular duel, wherein Russia, Austria, and Great Britain were striving their best to make capital out of the proposed kingdom, and each would doom the two other rivals to play a secondary *rolé*. This mission of a few months is eminently interesting. The recital contains a world of details, including a week's trip to Moscow and a visit to Berlin.

The return home was followed by a second marriage, the masterful diplomatist having rejected all refusal; and Mrs. Canning's influence in the embassy became an ever increasing quantity. During the third mission (1826-27) events marched fast. The "barbarisation of the Morea" and Ibrahim Pasha excited the strongest feeling in England, especially among the poets; and matters were complicated by the stubborn opposition of Sultan Mahmud, who had consolidated his power upon the judicial massacre of the Jannisaries; by "the impracticability of those rascally Turks"; by the effects of Lord Strangford's mischievous blundering; by the inertia of the Duke and Lord Aberdeen; and, lastly, by the death of George Canning.

Although Czar Nicholas—"the handsome youth who was destined to keep all Europe in alarm [?] for thirty years and to close a proud career under the pressure of a disastrous [?] war"—had succeeded to his brother with sentiments somewhat more pacific, the question of prestige was further complicated, and confusion was worse confounded, by a French army in the Peloponnesus, and by *pourparlers* concerning the frontiers of New Hellas. Her enemies would have confined her to the Morea and the central islands of the Archipelago—*i.e.*, the Cyclades—with the

futile fancy of imprisoning a high-spirited, energetic, and ambitious race, ever proud of its past, to a desert of limestone dotted with oases. Her friends advocated as much northern extension as possible, and a compromise was effected for the Volo-Arta line—thoroughly insufficient as events are still proving.

The Gordian knot was cut at Navarino, where a stupid Turkish frigate fired the first shot. The Porte was mightily indignant, the diplomatists applied for their passports, Russia declared war against the Porte, and Canning, escaping to Smyrna in a small merchantman, returned to England (1827). His proceedings, although the mission had been an utter failure, were approved by the Cabinet; but he had been "nearly dead of fatigue and anxiety," and he had found "this Palace (as it is called) nearly as bad a grinding-mill as your Foreign Office." Yet in the next year he set out to study the Greek Question upon the spot; met at Calamos his old Philhellenic friend, General Church, touched at Navarino, had an interview with Ibrahim Pasha, who, "considering that he is on the point of being turned out of his province *bag and baggage* [hence, by-the-by, the Gladstone bag] was in excellent spirits," and joined his three colleague ambassadors in conference at Poros, where their decisions touching delimitation were formed and reported home. Count Capodistrias came to the fore, and Canning left Greece to winter at Naples. His liberal views of the new Hellas frontier were simply censured by "the Scottish Earl." Canning, having retorted as un courteously, sent in a conditional resignation (February, 1829), and "for nearly three years the Greek Question knew him no more."

"His long-desired opportunity for parliamentary work had come at last, and he exchanged the dignity and emoluments of an ambassador for the hazardous enjoyment of a seat in the House of Commons" (i. 493). His career of twelve years began with Old Sarum (1828) and was continued in Stockbridge and King's Lynn. He attributes his notable failure—for, like the magnates of Anglo-India, he was an essayist, not an orator, and he had lost touch of the people—to "shyness or timidity and penury of spirit," forgetting vanity and love of approbation; and he had reason to wish that "his nerves were made of cart-ropes." "It cost him a good deal to walk up the House; to go above the gangway was for some time simply impossible." He would enter, primed with copious notes, and make exit humiliated by the contrast of purpose with performance. It was the same in the Lords, where a magnificent exordium would frequently end in a solemn break-down. I still hold to my assertion that Canning gained a prodigious reputation in England—like not a few others—chiefly by living out of it.

R. F. BURTON.

"Canterbury Poets."—*Chaucer*. Selected and edited by Frederick Noel Paton. (Walter Scott.)

MR. NOEL PATON'S little volume of selections has at least one great claim on all Chaucer-lovers, for it saves us from the reproach of having allowed the quincenary of the Canterbury Pilgrimage to pass by utterly