



steady growth in resources and its rise in world esteem, has earned a high place in the councils of mankind.

The Department's growth is significant proof of its wide public acceptance. Today, after 76 years of public service, it holds a leading place among life assurance offices, with over 100,000 policy holders and insurances in force of £45,000,000. Its financial strength and high standard of service are indeed worthy of the finest traditions of a great time-honoured enterprise.

#### FROM THE 1945 ANNUAL REPORT

Benefits paid since inception;	£21,407,803
New Assurances in 1945;	£4,923,809
*Bonuses allotted for 1945;	£191,344

\*Owing to staff shortages individual bonus notices are not being issued.

## GOVERNMENT LIFE INSURANCE DEPARTMENT

The Pioneer New Zealand Office  
J. W. Macdonald: Commissioner.



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## BOOKS

# THE BACKROOM LIBERAL

ACTON: THE FORMATIVE YEARS. By David Mathew. Eyre and Spottiswoode.

(Reviewed by David Hall)

LORD ACTON, the father of modern history, was the protagonist of impartiality ("I wholly disagree with what you are saying, but shall defend to the death, your right to say it"), of restraint upon authority (his own dictum, "All power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely"), and of human liberty. His career was devoted not to affairs, but to the ideas that mould affairs, the great advantages of his birth minimised by a bewildering integrity. No man gave himself so unswervingly to the disinterested pursuit of truth. If we neglect his ideas to-day, our own lives will thereby be the more nasty, poor, brutish and short. He first saw the ugliness and cruelty under the seducing outward glory of the nation-state.

Acton lacked one gift only, that of articulateness. His deep wisdom lies buried in a few brief reviews and lectures, undistinguished in style; he died with his great history of liberty unwritten. Some might say that it was the inhibiting effect of wealth that Acton laboured in his study rather than gave his life for this or that upon the barricades. I would say this was due to the security of his age when it was still possible to believe that human reason alone might persuade men to guard their own liberties.

The richness of Acton's heritage (in every sense of both words) is overwhelming. His grandfather, half-French, made a career as a faithful minister of the infamous Bourbon dynasty of Naples and Sicily, and late in life inherited an English baronetcy. His mother, daughter and heiress of a German nobleman who was also a peer of France (the Duke of Dalberg), married, after his father's early death, Earl Granville, an English Whig politician. Acton thus had a cosmopolitan ancestry and a wealth of associations with both continental and English political life which sometimes balanced and cancelled each other out. Brought up in the tradition of English Catholicism, he knew something of the frustrations which still confronted a religious minority, even after the passing of the Emancipation Act; he had to seek his university education in Munich (ironic, that he died Professor of History at Cambridge). At the same time he was in the closest touch with the national life of countries where his own religion was in a majority. (An uncle of his was a cardinal). He knew continental absolutism at first hand; it was in his blood. Yet he had walked straight into the tradition of English liberalism, and Gladstone was to become a dominant influence in his life. Not the least important factor in his circumstances was that his own father dying when the historian was three, remained for him only a handsome figure in an equestrian portrait.

In this biography David Mathew assembles and scrutinises all the influences, family, religious and intellectual,

which helped to mould the mind of the earnest young member of Parliament who so soon gave up active politics for the study and writing of history. Acton owed much to his Munich tutor, Dr. von Dollinger, but more still to the continuing influence of the writings of Edmund Burke (most conservative of liberals, and most liberal of conservatives).

"—haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree,

That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century after century,

Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality"

the Burke who wrote "Liberty, too, must be limited in order to be possessed."

David Mathew has a gift for the unexpected word, though this does sometimes lead him, amused by his own virtuosity, to try to do with a phrase what he should hardly attempt in a paragraph. He combines vivacity with a "remote exact astringent mind" (his own description of de Tocqueville). Though he marshals and deploys masses of detail, he can always pierce to the heart of any matter with swift, masterful judgment, as for instance when he remarks so blandly that Acton "had all the rich man's abhorrence of self-seeking."

The distinguished historian of the Jacobean age, David Mathew is an English Roman Catholic Bishop. But he began life as a professional naval officer, serving afloat in the 1914-18 war, and to this we owe his historical essays, *The Naval Heritage*. It required self-restraint to confine this book to the early part of Acton's life and not to anticipate the years of his more significant maturity. Its zestful and vigorous tone does not distract us from the seriousness and nobility of its subject, whose unique place as an historian "is the result of the fruition of his unexampled reading with a rare power of correlation, and based upon a mixed and improbable inheritance."

## SOME BRIEF FOLLY

HOW TO RIDE A BICYCLE. A. R. D. Fairburn. The Pelorus Press.

THE RAKEHELLY MAN, and Other Verses. A. R. D. Fairburn. The Caxton Press.

THESE two small productions from different publishers have a common author and a common attitude of cheerful irresponsibility, though this attitude is much more marked in the first, which is sheer nonsense all the way, than in the second, which does contain a few moderately rational interludes (for example, "Hymn of Peace" and "Boarding House"). And even when he is speaking in his most frivolous vein in these verses, Mr. Fairburn occasionally injects a note into his voice which suggests that he would like you, at that point, to take him seriously. The first poem, "The Rakehelly Man," which gives the collection its title, is what is generally known as a "bawdy ballad"—not bawdy enough, of course, to be offensive, but sufficiently so to be unquotable here at any length. However, the last stanza of

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