

**THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
GEORGE
BANCROFT, VOLUME
I. [NEW YORK-1908]**

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The Life and Letters of George Bancroft, Volume I. [New York-1908] by M. A. de Wolfe Howe

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VOLUME I

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PREFACE

ABOUT five years ago the late Mrs. John C. Bancroft entrusted to me the private papers of her father-in-law that I might prepare the biography now presented. They were so numerous that the task of drawing forth from the mass of written words some semblance of the man whom they concerned seemed at first to offer nothing but difficulties. Yet it soon appeared that Mr. Bancroft himself had done much to simplify his biographer's work. The correspondence was, for the most part, well arranged; and, best of all, I found that Mr. Bancroft had secured many of his own early letters from their recipients, and had followed the practice of preserving copies of most of the letters written during his active life. When the source of manuscript material in the following pages is not specifically noted, it may therefore be understood to lie in the papers placed at my disposal.

In one of the multitude of letters not used, I find Mr. Bancroft exclaiming, "Oh! these children and biographers who cannot leave in the dark what belongs there." What does belong there, and what does not?

These are questions which the biographer must take the responsibility of answering with that uncompromising finality which an architect uses in building a house. No two architects, or biographers, confronted with the same problem, can rear precisely the same structure. Here the problem has been one of selection and elimination rather than search. If I have not always eliminated enough, it has been through a desire to shed authentic light upon a character not without its contradictions. Where interpretation and comment have been called for, I can only hope they have been given with the sympathetic candour which should exist between a biographer and his subject.

For counsel and other assistance of great variety and value I am indebted to many friends and kinsmen of Mr. Bancroft, and to certain friends of my own. Special acknowledgments must be made to Professor Wilder D. Bancroft and Mr. Charles Bruten Perkins; to the Hon. John Bigelow, Mr. Charles K. Bolton of the Boston Athenæum, Mr. Andrew McFarland Davis, Mrs. J. C. Bancroft Davis, Mr. Wilberforce Eames of the New York Public Library (Lenox Branch), Mr. Worthington C. Ford of the Library of Congress, the Rev. Dr. Edward Everett Hale, Professor Albert Bushnell Hart, Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Dr. James K. Hosmer, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, Mr. William C. Lane of the Harvard College Library, the Hon. Henry Cabot Lodge, Mrs. Thornton K. Lothrop, Mr. Leonard L. Mackall, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, Pro-

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fessor Charles Eliot Norton, Professor and Mrs. Henry G. Pearson, the late Mr. Linzee Prescott, Mr. Josiah P. Quincy, Dr. Austin Scott, Professor W. M. Sloane, Mr. Ainsworth R. Spofford of the Library of Congress, and Mr. George G. Wolkins. That Mrs. John C. Bancroft, under whose friendly guidance the work was begun, has not lived to see its completion, is a source of the deepest regret.

BOSTON, *February*, 1908.