

ELDON, John Scott

LORD ELDON'S

Anecdote Book

Edited by

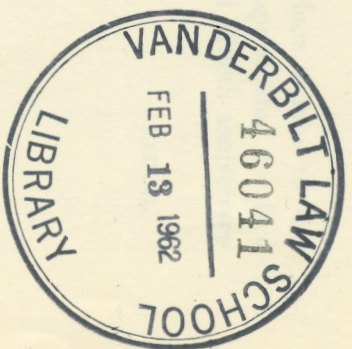
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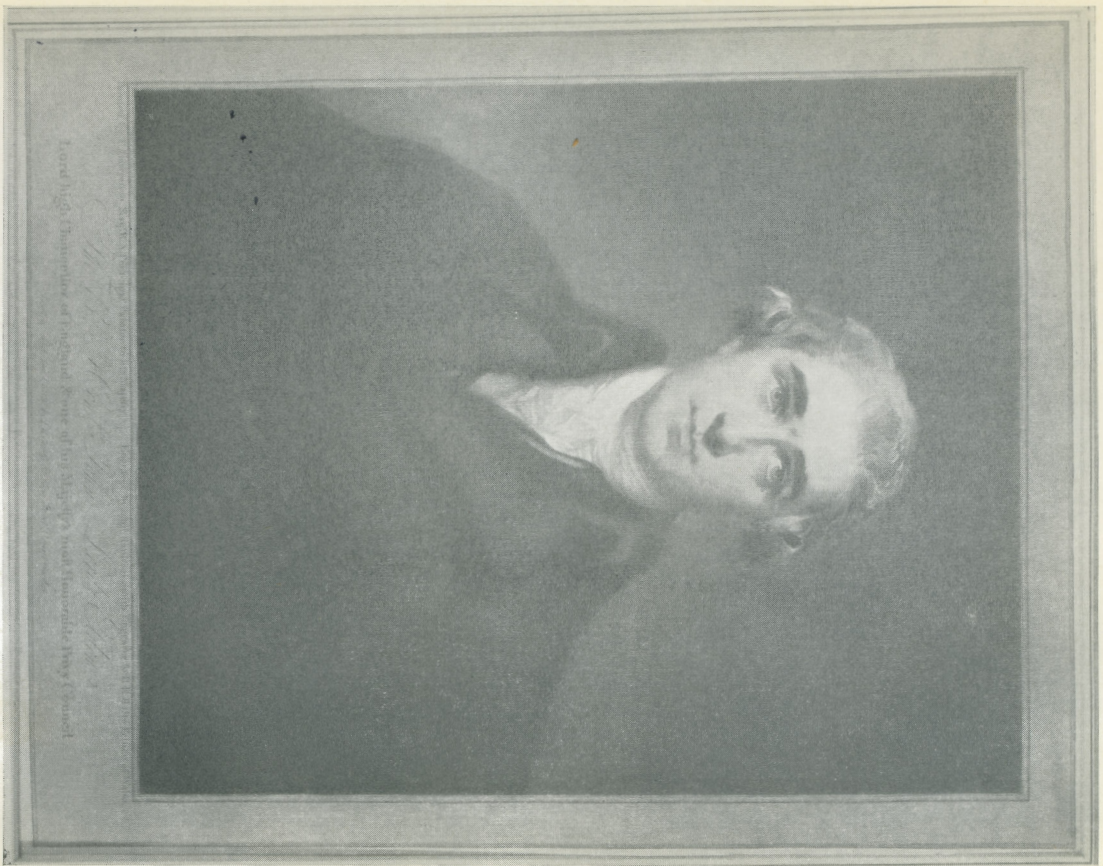
With a Foreword by

THE FOURTH EARL OF ELDON, K.C.V.O.



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Lord Eldon

Frontispiece

them—that such a Coalition would, as to both, have destroyed the Utility of their public Characters, the Country detesting such Coalitions—this I stated after the Administration was formed.

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When his late Majesty was recovering, but not entirely recovered from one of his Indispositions, upon my visiting him, as I did every Morning, he took out a Watch from a Drawer, and said he had worn it for 20 years, and desired me to accept it, and wear it for his Sake. I declined to accept it—at first he was extremely angry, and asked with much Earnestness why I did not obey him. I said that it was impossible for me to be of any use to his Majesty, if, under the then Circumstances, I accepted any thing from him. He wept—about a year afterwards he sent me the watch enclosed in a Box, with a Gold Chain and Seal, and with a Note expressing his Commands that I should take and wear these in remembrance of him, and that I could now accept them with as much propriety, as I had before declined to receive the Watch. I accepted them with much Gratitude, and I hope that they will be ever anxiously preserved in my family.

The Seal is a curious one. It contains a figure of Religion looking up to Heaven, and a Figure of Justice with no Bandage over the Eyes, his Majesty stating that Justice should be bold enough to look the world in the face. The Motto was His Dirige Te. It happened that I sent a letter to my old excellent Friend Dr. Seivre of Medomsley, sealed with this seal. He shewed it to his Friend and Neighbour Dr. Zouch, who had refused a Bishopric. Dr. Zouch preached an Assise Sermon soon afterwards in Durham Cathedral, which had a passage in it, representing Justice without a bandage over the Eyes. The Sermon was published, and several Reviews of the Time stated,

that they had hunted all Authors, Grecian and Roman, to discover where Dr. Zouch had borrowed the Hint so to describe Justice but in vain and complimented him much upon a Thought so new and so beautiful.

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His late Majesty, Geo. the 3rd, was born on the 4th of June. The fourth of June was also my birthday. At the Levee on the King's birthday, his Majesty always addressed me instantly upon seeing me to this effect "Dont say a word to me till I have spoken to you—till I have, as I anxiously do, first wished you a great many happy Returns of this day" and then he permitted me to pay him the Compliments, which all expressed to him on his Birth day.

8

During one of his Majesty's Indispositions, and when there was a doubt whether he was sufficiently recovered to make it fit to take his Royal Sign Manual to a Commission for passing Acts of Parliament, the time approached, when, if the Mutiny Bills were not renewed and past, the Establishments of the Army and Navy, in the midst of War, must have broken up.⁵ It became, therefore, absolutely necessary to have his Royal Sign Manual to acts for continuing these Establishments. The Chancellor is the Minister, who is responsible for that Act. I determined, as the Law acknowledges no Incapacity in the

⁵ Under the law of the English Constitution a legislative Bill which has been passed by both Houses of Parliament does not become an Act (and therefore law) until assented to by the Crown. One of the methods of expressing the Royal pleasure is the commission under the sign manual; by such means the Sovereign may entrust to Commissioners the power to assent to Bills. The Mutiny Bills, like the Army Acts, had to be renewed annually—if they were not passed, the military establishment could not be maintained. In this way Parliament retained control over the army, curbing the powers of the Crown and Executive. (See Anson's *Law and Custom of the Constitution*, 3rd ed., Vol. 2, Appendix to Chap. 1.

King, whatever may be the State of his Mind, to repair to him, to take the Royal Sign Manual—and, if I found his Majesty's Mind disordered, nevertheless to pass the bills, and then to state the fact to Parliament and leave Parliament to dispose of me as it thought proper. On the other hand, if I found his Majesty not disordered, to take the Sign Manual, and pass the Bills without stating any thing. I accordingly waited on his Majesty, carried with me the Commission, and a brief abstract of the several intended Acts. I began reading that abstract—a caution not usual, when the King was well—and he said, My Lord, you are cautious. I entreated his Majesty to allow that under the then circumstances. Oh, he said, you are certainly right in that, but you should be correct as well as cautious. I said I was not conscious that I was not correct. No, said he, you are not, for if you will look into the Commission, which you have brought me to sign, you will see that I there state that I have fully considered the Bills proposed to receive my Sign Manual—to be correct therefore I should have the Bills to peruse and consider. I stated to him that he never had had the Bills, whilst I had been Chancellor, and that I did not know that he had ever had the Bills. He said during a part of his Reign he had always had them, until Lord Thurlow had ceased to bring them, and the Expression his Majesty used was that Lord Thurlow had said It was Nonsense his giving himself the Trouble to read them. I said his Majesty had satisfied me that I had used Caution enough, took the Sign Manual, and went to the House of Lords, and, when about passing the Commission, Lord Fitzwilliam up and said I wish to ask whether the Chancellor declares his Majesty is equal to the Act of signing the Commission with full knowledge upon the Subject, or to that effect. I answered I am about to execute the Commission. On a future Illness, when the Queen had a Council appointed to her to assist her in the Care of His Majesty, and my Name was proposed as one—a Peer—

I think Lord King, objected and moved that my Name should be omitted, insisting that I ought not upon the former Occasion to have executed that Commission. I was obliged, as Speaker, to put the Question upon my own Unfitness—It was clear that there was a great Majority in my favor. The opposition would not divide that the small Numbers, which constituted their Minority, might not be ascertained. I met this Trick by another—by declaring that the Majority were against me, knowing that that would force a division. It did so, and the Majority in my favour was very great.

Note, when I went to take the King's Sign Manual, some other Ministers wanted it in their Department. They sent the papers to me, instead of coming themselves to support me by their Acts. I refused to tender any of them to the King.

9

His Majesty, George the third, repeatedly offered to confer upon me the Dignity of an Earldom. I, as repeatedly, stated to his Majesty my humble Advice that the Crown should not confer more than one Title of Peerage upon the same Individual, or in other words, more than one Title of Peerage in one Generation. I frankly told him that a Peer had, as a principal Object of Expectation from the favor of the Crown, advancement in the Peerage, and had little but that to look for, and that an additional Rank in the Peerage ought to be made as much, and as considerable a Favor on the part of the Crown, as the first Grant of a dignity. That this must, of course, admit of exception in extraordinary Cases—the Duke of Wellington, for Instance, when he was first introduced into the House of Peers, came into it a Baron, a Viscount, an Earl, a Marquis and a Duke—every one of these dignities having been conferred for eminent Services performed from Time to Time, and upon that Introduction, I, as Speaker, communicated to him the

and, in case his Majesty did not recover, it being thought certain that the Great Seal would be taken from my Custody, and that I should not be restored to the Chief Justiceship, if I had resigned it—during all the period, therefore, in which his Majesty's indisposition continued, I remained in the very singular Situation of a Person, both Lord Chancellor and Lord Justice of the Common Pleas exercising publicly the duties of both Offices.

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Soon after I became Solicitor General, his Majesty Geo. III at Weymouth, with the kindness, which he uniformly manifested to me, said Well I hope my Promotion has been beneficial to you. I asked his Majesty if he meant in professional Income. He said Yes, in that and in other Respects. I told him, what was strictly true, that, in annual Receipt I thought I lost about two thousand Pounds a year. He seemed surprised and asked how that could be accounted for. I stated to him that the Attention of his Law Officers was called to matters of international Law, public Law, and the Laws of Revenue and other Matters, with which, not having been previously familiar, they were obliged to devote to them a vast deal of Time, and to withdraw it from those common Matters of business, which were very profitable, and I concluded by stating what was then the habit of the Solicitors of the public Offices, to give the Solicitor General only three Guineas with his Majesty's, the Government's, Cases, which required more Time and Attention fully to consider, and satisfactorily to answer, than the cases of private Individuals with which their Attornies frequently left fees of 10, 15, 20 or 25 Guineas—Oh, said the King. Then for the first Time I comprehend what I never

could before understand—that it has been always so difficult to get any Opinions from my Law Officers.⁵⁷

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I met a Prelate, who was, at that time, Bishop of a See, not very richly endowed, coming out of his Majesty Geo. III's Closet at Buckingham House, as I was going into it. The King asked me if I did not very much like Sincerity. I answered, Yes—So does that Prelate, said the King—for he has just assured me that he is perfectly content with his present preferment. He should wish indeed, he said, to have Salisbury instead of it—but he added that he so wished for no other Reason whatever, but merely that he might have the Honor of giving me a breakfast in my way to Weymouth. Can you, he added, believe that, when a Bishop says it? I can't.

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In one of his Majesty, Geo. 3ds. Illnesses, when he was at Buckingham House, it was conceived to be my Duty, as Chancellor, to call at that House every day. This was constantly done, to the Interruption of the business of my Court to a great Extent, for which the public Opinion made no Allowance. Upon one day when I went to make my Call of Duty, Dr. Simmons, the medical Attendant constantly there, represented to me the Embarrassment he was exposed to, being persuaded that, if his Majesty could have a walk frequently round the Garden behind the House, it would be of the most essential benefit to him—that, if he took his Walk with the Doctor

⁵⁷ The practice of remunerating the Law Officers by brief fees for court work in addition to their salaries did not cease until 1946. They have been precluded from taking private cases since 1895.

or any of his Attendants, he was overlooked from the windows of Grosvenor Place, and reports were circulated very contrary to the Truth respecting his Majesty's mental Health—that on the other hand, his Majesty's family were afraid of accompanying him—and that he, the Doctor, did not know how to act, as the Walk was of vast Importance to his Majesty's Recovery. It was to me plain that he wished that I should offer to attend his Majesty, and walk with him in the Garden—I offered to do so, if he thought it likely to be useful to the King—He then went into the next Room where the King was, and I heard him say, Sir, The Chancellor is come to take a Walk with your Majesty, if your Majesty pleases to allow it—With all my heart I overheard the King say, and he called for his Hat and Cane. We walked two or three times round Buckingham House Gardens. There was, at first, a momentary hurry and Incoherence in his Majesty's Talk—but this did not endure two Minutes—during the rest of the walk there was not the slightest Aberration in his Majesty's Conversation, and he gave me the history of every Administration in his Reign. When we returned into the House, his Majesty, laying down his Hat and Cane, placed his Head upon my Shoulder, and burst into Tears—and, after recovering himself, bowed me out of the Room in his usual Manner. Dr. Simmons told me afterwards that this had been of infinite Use towards his Recovery.

It is a curious Circumstance that walking down St. James's Park after I left Buckingham House, I found that it had been asserted that in that very Morning his Majesty had been seen walking round the Buckingham House Gardens, and that he was so very furious, that the Attendants, employed by Dr. Simmons, had been obliged by Violence to carry him into the House. This was one of the falsehoods which, for political purposes, were constantly fabricated about the poor King. Simmons assured me that there was not the Semblance of Truth in it.

About the time when a Regency was first likely to take place in the Reign of his Majesty, Geo. 3rd, there was a Report circulated, in a manner prejudicial to the Character of Lord Thurlow, about the time when he made the famous Declaration in the House of Lords "If I forget the King, may God forget me".¹⁵ This Report imputed to him that he was then, or immediately before, negotiating to become a Party in the Regency Administration, to which none other of the King's friends, as they were denominated, were to be admitted—and a publication of this year (1825) has produced Letters, imputing that such was his conduct. I was, at the time of the Regency, honored with Lord Thurlow's Intimacy—hardly a day passed, in which there was not much interesting Conversation upon that Subject between Lord Thurlow and the King's friends, with which I was acquainted. I do not presume to determine what of Truth or falsehood there was in the Report of that day, or in the publication of this day (1825). But I well remember, that it was the universal persuasion that, if a Regency was once appointed, his Majesty never would be restored to his Throne, tho' he might be restored to his mental health—whether this was an opinion ill or well founded I, also, do not presume to determine—but I have no doubt that it was the Opinion of many of the King's friends that it was very desirable, for the King's Sake, that Lord Thurlow should continue Chancellor, however the Regency Administration might be composed, if that could be so arranged. Considering the extreme heat and bitterness of Parties in Parliament after the King was declared to be recovered, it seems very extraordinary that, if Lord Thurlow's Conduct had during the debates about

¹⁵ The King's illness took place in 1788. Thurlow's speech being delivered on December 15. A full account of Thurlow's duplicity at the time appears in Campbell, *Lives of the Chancellors*, Vol. V, Chap. clx.

the Regency been dishonourable with respect to any Object he had in view, if the Regency took place, no allusion should be made to it in debates when he might have had an Opportunity of explaining his Views, if his Conduct required Explanation. What Character is safe, if a Person is attacked when he is in his Grave?

197

During my first Chancellorship, and indeed, before it, when I was Attorney General, I was a Trustee in some of the purchases made by George III. When Chancellor I was frequently conversed with by him as to his intended will. When I was removed from the Chancellorship in 1806, that Event, nevertheless, left it a Matter of Necessity that his Majesty should occasionally see me with respect to my Trusteeship, and he continued his Inclination to converse with me about the disposal of his property. When called upon to go to Windsor, his Majesty wishing to see me upon these Subjects, in order to disarm political Jealousy, I communicated to Lord Grenville, then Minister, that I was going to Windsor, and the Nature of the business, which led to my visiting his Majesty. It happened, unfortunately, about this Time, that the Administration meditated a Bill in Parliament, which was favorable to the Roman Catholics, and that there was that Misunderstanding, in consequence of it, which led to the Kings dismissing his Administration in 1807. When that Event happened, which it did shortly after I had been at Windsor, many of the Adherents of that Administration most virulently abused me, insinuating that I had, when at Windsor, advised his Majesty to change his Ministers, and some even expressed an hope that, on some future day, when another Change might take Place, I should be impeached. The fact, and the Truth is, that, notwithstanding what was then passing between the King and his Ministers, I

was entirely ignorant of it before I went, I heard not a Syllable respecting it whilst I was with the King, nor had I any Information respecting it, till I was afterwards commanded to attend his Majesty with Lord Liverpool, When he was pleased to inform us that he had changed his Administration, and stated to us the Reasons, upon which he had acted, and I well remember his saying that to me it must be Matter of great Surprise, having seen me so lately, and not a Word having then passed respecting it—which was the fact.

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When the Duke of York made his Speech in the House of Lords, stated in a former Page, many Persons pronounced it to be a speech, which it had been concerted between the Duke and others should be made by him, and which some declared had been composed by others, and by him only repeated, and I know that it was rumoured that the speech had been composed by me. After first stating that I had not the least Knowledge that the Duke of York meant to utter a Word upon the Subject, when he came into the House of Lords on the Evening, when he made that Speech, I think it unnecessary to record the fact that I had in no manner or degree been consulted upon the Subject by his Royal Highness—and that neither to my knowledge or belief it was known to any Person whatever that he had proposed to address the House, as he did address it, or to address it at all upon the Subject, to which that Speech related. I had it further from the King that, on the Sunday preceding the Day when the Speech was delivered, his Majesty began to talk to the Duke at Carleton House upon the Catholic Question, and that the Duke requested his Majesty to defer talking to him upon that Subject at all, till some time should have passed after that day when they were together—and, in a subsequent Conversation which I had with the Duke after he had made the