

A YEAR AT HARTLEBURY

or

The Election

The revelation that a long-forgotten novel first published anonymously in 1834 is the work of Benjamin Disraeli and his sister Sarah is an exciting literary event. Newly discovered letters between brother and sister prove without doubt that it was written jointly by them. We do not have to look far for the reason for their secrecy. The vividly-described election which forms the centrepiece of the story is clearly based on Disraeli's recent experiences as an unsuccessful candidate in two elections at High Wycombe. His political career had a long way to go and the last thing he wanted was to jeopardise it by revealing his motives in the past or his hopes for the future.

The hero, Aubrey Bohun, has, like Disraeli, recently returned from mysterious travels in the East, but unlike him has his own castle and an income of £30,000 a year. The character of Bohun obviously contains certain amount of wish fulfilment and allows brother and sister to incorporate in the novel elements of that popular genre, known in its day as 'silver fork' fiction — revelations of high life. Although there is much of this and of melodrama too, there is also some splendid social irony, put over with great epigrammatic panache, in the descriptions of life among the clergy and gentry of Buckinghamshire. We see them first jockeying for the hand of the beautiful Helen Molesworth and then captivated by the romantic radicalism of their aristocratic candidate.

As Michael Foot says 'the volume is quite fit to take its place in the true Disraeli canon and contains many gems which add fresh gleams to the portrait of Disraeli himself.... To read the book is to be convinced as well as enraptured.'

There are two appendices explaining the fascinating piece of literary detection that proved the book's authorship and the parallels between the politics of Aubrey Bohun and Disraeli himself.

At the time of writing this novel in 1833, Benjamin Disraeli was twenty-eight and his sister Sarah was thirty. Their family home was at Bradenham, in Buckinghamshire, the Hartlebury of the novel. Disraeli had fought and lost two elections at nearby High Wycombe in the previous year, after returning from a protracted tour of the Middle East. He had already published four novels — *Vivian Grey* (Henry Colburn, 1826), *The Young Duke* (Henry Colburn, 1831), *Contarini Fleming* (John Murray, 1832), and *Alroy* (Saunders and Otley, 1833) — but was not to become an MP until 1837.

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BENJAMIN AND SARAH DISRAELI

with appendixes by Ellen Henderson
and John P. Matthews

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