

LORD ELGIN

a representative peer in the British parliament from 1790-1840, and an ambassador to several European courts; but he is best known to history by the fact that he seriously crippled his private fortunes by his purchase, while in the East, of that magnificent collection of Athenian art which was afterwards bought at half its value by the British government and placed in the British Museum, where it is still known as the "Elgin Marbles." From his father, we are told by his biographer,¹ he inherited "the genial and playful spirit which gave such a charm to his social and parental relations, and which helped him to elicit from others the knowledge of which he made so much use in the many diverse situations of his after life." The deep piety and the varied culture of his mother "made her admirably qualified to be the depository of the ardent thoughts and aspirations of his boyhood." At Oxford, where he completed his education after leaving Eton, he showed that unselfish spirit and consideration for the feelings of others which were the recognized traits of his character in after life. Conscious of the unsatisfactory state of the family's fortunes, he laboured strenuously even in college to relieve his father as much as possible of the expenses of his education. While living very much to himself, he never failed to

¹ "Letters and Journals of James, eighth Earl of Elgin, etc." Edited by Theodore Waldron, C.B. For fuller references to works consulted in the writing of this short history, see *Bibliographical Notes* at the end of this book.