

## CHAPTER I

### FOREWORD

To more than one reader of this biography the death of Francis Galton, following within five years that of one of the keenest of his friends and lieutenants, *Walter Frank Raphael Weldon*, meant not only the loss of a revered leader, but of another personal friend and counsellor. Some of my readers will remember quite recent visits, and fertile talk in the white-enamelled, sunlit drawing-room at Rutland Gate, with its collection of Darwin, Galton and Barclay relics; the table at which Erasmus Darwin wrote, alongside the easel with its powerful, if unfinished, portrait by Furse, telling—as the highest phase of art alone can tell—why and even how Francis Galton inspired men. To such visitors anything written here must appear incomplete and one-sided; the atmosphere of a really great man—and such unquestionably Francis Galton was—cannot be reproduced in words; the tones of voice, the subtle sequences in phases of thought, the characteristic combinations of physical expression and of mental emphasis, which make the personality, can only be suggested by a great master of words, or at best outlined by a famous craftsman; the student of science, unless he be endowed with a poet's inspiration, must fail to provide even such adumbration. Nor again is it easy to portray the essential features of a man who is at least one generation older than yourself. There are in life two barriers between man and man more marked, perhaps, than any others, the reticence of age to youth, and the reticence of age to age. The friends we have grown up with from our youth, whose emotions and beliefs have been moulded under like physical and mental environments, we may perhaps truly know; we have caught their individuality before age laid constraint on its fullest expression. But the friends of adult life have no common mental history—the community of like growth fails them; they stand to each other even as great civilised nations whose culture and art may be revered and understood, whose knowledge and customs aid but do not replace home

growths. In youth friends are as primitive tribes, they raid each other's preserves both to destroy and to capture what they do not themselves possess; they mould each other's mental growth by friction and combat, rather than by peaceful interchange of commodities; the barrier of age to age, or of age to youth is wanting, and we actually know our friends in the very making of their characters. The friendships of age and age, and of youth and age possess many factors which fail the friendship of youth and youth; there is probably no wiser gift a parent can wish for a child than the rare friendship of youth and age, and this even if it verges on hero-worship. But neither such friendship, nor that of age with age, is the one which best fits the biographer for his task of measuring the circumstances which have influenced a life, or of portraying the mental evolution of what he has only known in its ripest form. Francis Galton was seventy years of age before the present writer knew him personally, although the written influence began five years earlier; he was seventy-five at least before intimacy ripened into a friendship which grew in closeness with the years. This, and the age difference of between thirty and forty years, might disqualify, and indeed do disqualify the writer for any attempt at what he understands by genuine biography—from a portrayal such as Arnold gives us of Clough, or Hogg of Shelley—the intense reality which springs from a personal and intimate knowledge of youthful development. But to be drawn in this sense we must die young, before at least our contemporaries have lost the will and power to wield the pen; and there are but few who achieve and die young in the field of science. Francis Galton, and therein the Fates were kindly, was not one of these. He was over fifty years of age before much of his best work was done; he was sixty-seven when his *Natural Inheritance* was published, the book which may be said to have created his school. For although his methods were developed in papers of the preceding decade, that book undoubtedly first made them known to us, and found him the lieutenants who built up the school of modern statistics. Other work of the highest value and of permanent usefulness in many branches of science Galton achieved before he was fifty, but the first central fact of his life is the relative lateness of much of his most inspiring work. His greatest contribution to method was published after he was sixty; his greatest appreciation of what that method might achieve for man was hardly pressed on public attention before

he was eighty. How then shall one, who knew him—however intimately—only in the last years of life portray the mental evolution which was proceeding stage by stage for fifty years before friendship began? A very slight introspection tells each one of us how complex was the scaffolding by which the structure of our own intellectual opinions has been reared; how many attempts, how many failures, how many moulding men and things have contributed their part! How little of this do even our life-long intimates know, how little finds its expression in diaries, letters or the printed word! Could such things enable one to understand the whole nature of a man, the present writer, owing to the extreme kindness of the relatives and friends of Francis Galton, would have small need to lament the failure of his task. But the sense of failure has grown as these pages took form. The man of strength and character, who knew what he wished to accomplish and carried it through; the leader who inspired us is there—even as we read him in Furse's portrait—but the evolution of the man—the story of the mental growth, which should be the aim of every genuine biographer—is seen but darkly and from afar; it is but faintly shadowed in the written word and screened to dimness by those barriers of which the author has spoken. For reasons such as these he can only hope to place before his readers some phases of Francis Galton's life and some aspects of his scientific work. The real story of that life, the steep ascents, leading to wider horizons, won as all victorious minds have won them by struggle with earlier opinions and with a less developed self, the arduous final acceptance of new ideas as triumphant certitudes; these things the writer can but trace as they appear indistinctly to him; others will and must interpret in their own way, and will doubtless reach different view-points.

Galton of all men would not have desired this biography to be a panegyric. To be of service it must be, as he would have wished it, the life of a real man, of a man who makes mistakes, who has wandered from the path, or stumbled, who has striven after the wholly illusory, or towards things beyond his individual reach. The difference between the ordinary mortal and the one of subtler mind is not that the former strays, and the latter does not, but that the deviations in the one case leave no permanent impress, while in the other they are coined into a golden experience, which forms the wisdom marking the riper life. Hundreds of men have failed to reach distinction or gain immediate

profit by their school education, by their college careers, by their professional training, or by their early travels. There was a period when Galton's fate seemed to hang in the balance, when it appeared as if he would become an English country gentleman, whose pleasure lay in sport and whose aim in life was good comradeship. Then the instinct for creative action mastered his nature, and every apparent failure of the past seemed to have borne, not bitter fruit, but a golden experience essential to labours, which the reaper had never foreseen when he garnered his harvest. That conception is the key to the first thirty years of Galton's life. It will be found, we think, a clue to the lives of many men of power, who strive in turn towards numerous goals, before they have learnt to realise their fitting sphere of achievement. Such apprenticeship with all its possible bungling, such *Lehr- und Wanderjahre*, can only be reckoned as idle when the matured journeyman fails to produce his masterpiece.

Of one thing we are certain, that the reader, who will follow patiently our hero through the great and the little, through the apparently trivial and the apparently vital incidents of this story, cannot fail to fall in love with a nature, which met life so joyously, and from childhood to extreme old age was resolved to see life at its best and be responsive to its many-sided experiences. Because Galton was a specialist in few, if any directions, because he appreciated without stint many forms of human activity, he was able to achieve in many spheres, where the established powers with greater craftsmanship but narrower outlook had failed to recognise that there were still verities to be ascertained. In the "fallow years" Galton wandered joyously through life, but he had been and he had seen, and he was thus trained, as few specialists are trained, to achieve in a marked degree.