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## **Maurice Harold Macmillan, First Earl of Stockton, 10 February 1894 - 29 December 1986**

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## FIRST EARL OF STOCKTON

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deployed abroad in the first, and once at least during the second world war, he was not without considerable success in political manoeuvre and, consequently, his life was not without its share of success and even contentious challenges of good.

Maurice Harold Macmillan was born on 10 February 1894 at 52 Cadogan Place. His father was Maurice Crawford Macmillan, and, like some other distinguished figures of the age, his mother was a United States citizen, Helen Belles, of Spencer, Indiana. His grandfather, Alexander, was the brother of Daniel Macmillan, the founder of the famous family firm of publishers with whom Stockton remained connected throughout his life, beginning that connection in his



*Harold Macmillan*



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Elected F.R.S. 1962

BY LORD HAILSHAM OF ST MARYLEBONE, C.H., P.C., F.R.S.

In HAROLD MACMILLAN, first Earl of Stockton, the Society has lost arguably the most distinguished and certainly one of the longest lived of recent Fellows elected under Statute 12, that is for services and achievements outside the range of the natural sciences. He was also one of the most skilful of 20th-century prime ministers, and the last public figure to grow to maturity before the outbreak, in August 1914, of World War I. He was highly endowed by nature with first-class mental equipment, marred only by the fact that his distinguished military service prevented the acquisition of the university degree, which he would undoubtedly otherwise have achieved, almost certainly with a double first to his credit. His complex inner character is more difficult to assess. He was very much his own man. He was something of an actor, playing several parts, the crofter's great-grandson, the duke's son-in-law, the flâneur in Edwardian society who survived into another age, and latterly the decrepit elder statesman, given to reminiscence and often to historical analogy, sometimes a little far-fetched. Of undoubted religious commitment, unquestionable personal integrity and of proven physical courage displayed often in the first, and once at least during the second world war, he was nonetheless somewhat devious in political manoeuvre and, occasionally, as in the Suez crisis, given to sudden and even contentious changes of mind.

Maurice Harold Macmillan was born on 10 February 1894 at 52 Cadogan Place. His father was Maurice Crawford Macmillan, and, like some other distinguished figures of the age, his mother was a United States citizen, Helen Belles, of Spencer, Indiana. His grandfather, Alexander, was the brother of Daniel Macmillan, the founder of the famous family firm of publishers with whom Stockton remained connected throughout his life, bequeathing that connection to his



grandson Alexander, the present, and second earl. Macmillan always had a great and justified sense of family pride. In his autobiography, *Winds of change*, he was to write: 'To my father and my mother in their different ways I owe everything in my life. They were tolerant of follies and untiring in everything that could give their children pleasure or help in their advancement.'

His childhood and education were typical of that enjoyed by the boys of the time who belonged to the professional and prosperous middle class, Summerfields (1903), Eton College (3rd scholarship 1906–12), and Balliol (1912–14), when his education was brought abruptly to an end by the outbreak of World War I. His lifelong friends included the late Ronald Knox (who tutored him at Eton, helped him with his Greek iambics and nearly influenced him to become a Roman Catholic), and his fellow collegers in Conservative politics, Crookshank and Willink. In World War I he joined at first the 60th Rifles (KRRRC) but soon transferred to the Grenadier Guards where he saw his active service in the line and left behind him a reputation, quite certainly deserved, for almost legendary courage (as 'brave as Mr Macmillan' is said to have been the verdict of other ranks). He was four or five times wounded at the battle of the Somme very severely, which left him with a curious disability in his gait that remained a physical characteristic throughout the rest of his life. In the first year of peace (1919) he became aide-de-camp to the Duke of Devonshire, then Governor General of Canada, and there he met his future wife, Lady Dorothy Cavendish, whom he married in London in 1920 (at St Margaret's Westminster) and by whom he had three daughters and one son who predeceased him (the late Maurice Macmillan). After his return from Canada he joined the family publishing firm.

Macmillan's political career began in 1923 when he unsuccessfully contested Stockton but, standing there again in the General Election of 1924, he became a Member of the House of Commons at the end of that year and rapidly made a reputation as the member of a rather controversial group of young Tory idealists, then satirically known as the Y.M.C.A. (Young Men's Conservative Association). It was as a member of this group that he made his maiden speech in 1925 on the Budget Resolutions, a speech that he describes as provocative but successful.

As the assumption of Stockton as his principal title nearly sixty years later (1984) indicates, Harold Macmillan's character and future political philosophy were largely dominated by two motivations, a sense of public duty engendered by his survival of the holocaust of the Great War in which so many of his contemporaries had perished, and the traumatic experience of unemployment, seen at close range in the northeast of England, which continued to move him deeply to the very end of his life. It was during this period that he formed clearly the predilection for 'The Middle Way', which remained the basis of his political credo from the time when he was the part author of a joint pamphlet (1927) under



the title 'Industry and the State' to the delivery of his last and agreeably witty speeches in the House of Lords a few months before his death in 1986. Of 'Industry and the State' he wrote: 'It was a first essay in devising some coherent system lying between unadulterated private enterprise and collectivism. It was a policy which I afterwards called the Middle Way.'

However much Macmillan may have trimmed his sails to meet passing gusts of wind, it would be fair to say that he remained true to this conception throughout a long and distinguished career. Although it is fashionable now to underrate the phrase as inappropriate to present-day Conservative thought, it would not be right to do so. The Middle Way is to some extent obsolete as a prospectus precisely to the extent that, in its main thrust, and since 1945, it has become part of established national consensus, based as it is in Conservative eyes, the prescription of publicly organized social service within a mixed economy based primarily on private enterprise.

Unlike his near contemporaries R. A. Butler and Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan's promotion to office was anything but meteoric. He was again defeated at Stockton in 1929, and although re-elected there in 1931 and 1935 was far too outspoken in his criticisms of successive national and Conservative administrations, mainly on foreign policy issues, to win favour. In June 1936 he voted with the Opposition on a motion of censure and resigned the Government Whip over sanctions on Abyssinia and, though he accepted the whip again in 1937, in 1938 he became, in his own words 'a violent partisan' and intrigued with Spears and others to effect the fall of the Chamberlain administration and the acceptance of Winston Churchill (then virtually isolated) as the head of Government. His main contribution during these years was a series of pamphlets on the themes of industry and economic policy, which he either published or took part in publishing. These pamphlets culminated in his book, *The middle way*, published in 1938 on the eve of Munich.

Events, however, were to turn the rebel backbencher into an active member of Churchill's coalition. After the Norway debate (at the end of which he played an absurdly histrionic part) the Chamberlain Government fell and a few days later Macmillan was appointed by Churchill to work as Junior Minister to Herbert Morrison in the Ministry of Supply, a post that he did not leave until 1942.

Macmillan's real introduction to the higher ranks of international politics and foreign affairs came when, after a brief spell in the Colonial Office, he was asked by Churchill to join the Allied Force Headquarters, by this time set up in Algiers after the successful invasion of North Africa by the British First Army and an American Force under the supreme command of General Eisenhower. Macmillan was to be Minister of State of Cabinet rank reporting directly to the Prime Minister. In this his position corresponded more or less exactly to the Minister of State



already in post in Cairo supporting the Middle East Forces of the predominantly British Eighth Army. Owing to the deep divisions of the French between Vichy and de Gaulle, the recent assassination of Darlan and the rival pretensions of alternative French generals, the Algiers appointment proved incomparably the more important of the two.

From now on the somewhat eccentric and controversial backbench Conservative Member of Parliament emerged on to the world stage and, whether in high office or in opposition he never really left the centre of the scene. Although I myself claim to be the coiner, at a much later date, of the actual word, his cool temperament and patent and indomitable skill in untangling political knots gave him the reputation and skill of the 'unflappable' Supremac of later days. A description of his travels mainly by air in wartime aircraft (never a safe experience in those times) and accompanied by John Wyndham, his *fidus Achates*, reads almost like a Baedeker of the Middle East, Algiers, Tunis, Cairo, Sicily, Italy, Malta, Greece, Gibraltar, Crete, in each of which he met political problems usually seemingly insoluble. He was besieged in Athens, at the time of the Damaskinos affair and the attempted Communist coup, and suffered serious burns in the course of an air crash on his way to Egypt from Algiers with John Wyndham and Vice-Admiral Missoffe. The admiral, complaining of the loss of his cap, walked up and down in the flames wringing his hands and crying out 'Ma casquette, ma casquette; j'ai perdu ma casquette.' 'To this lament', Macmillan writes, 'I replied: "I don't care a damn about your casquette. J'ai perdu my bloody face."' Describing the same incident Wyndham records that at that moment Macmillan's moustache was burning with a bright blue flame. This was the last, and, after the Somme wound, probably the most serious of his war injuries. He was really lucky to have escaped with his life from the emergency exit of the burning plane, clad as he was against the cold in a vast green Ulster overcoat. The final chapter in this stage of his life was marked by a tragic episode, which, because it is still the subject of pending legal proceedings between an author and a publisher and one of the surviving participants, cannot be made the subject of a final judgment in this memorial notice. At the end of the war, in 1945, Stalin had induced the western leaders to hand over a number of Cossacks, who had fallen into Allied hands in the final convulsions of Hitler's overthrow, to the Soviet forces who appear then to have murdered them, or at least, as they would claim, had them executed. In what appears to have been a comparatively subordinate capacity Macmillan seems to have been an instrument in this tragic transaction. He himself records that it was a 'great grief' to him, but that there was 'no alternative'. His biographer, Nigel Fisher, claims that the matter had been the subject of an agreement at a higher level. I myself believe this, but the matter must remain unresolved until the conclusion of the litigation. The Coalition Government ended in the summer of 1945, after Macmillan had spent the



few months of the Caretaker Government as Secretary of State for Air in succession to the Liberal Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair. The General Election of 1945 left Macmillan without a seat for a few months. He had been defeated at Stockton for the third and last time, but was later elected at a by-election for the comparatively safe Conservative seat of Bromley. The next six years were spent on the Opposition Front Bench in which he seems to have played a comparatively small part beyond sharing in the publication of internal policy documents like the 'Industrial Charter' and the 'Right Road for Britain'. At that time Churchill did not favour the later practice of nominating members of his Shadow Cabinet for definite spheres of responsibility. Nevertheless at that time Macmillan enjoyed a prestige lower only than that of Churchill, R. A. Butler, and Eden. He was less prominent than his contemporaries Oliver Stanley and Harry Crookshank, but very highly regarded.

Macmillan's next chance came with the formation of Churchill's first postwar administration, which really built his reputation as a Cabinet Minister of the first rank. At the Conservative Party Conference of 1950 the leadership had been pushed by the rank and file to attempt the seemingly impossible task of building 300 000 houses a year. When Churchill resumed office in 1951 Macmillan, as Minister of Housing, was the Minister entrusted with this task. It was a risky assignment and Macmillan accepted it with a mixture of anxiety and disappointment at not being offered a more senior post. In the end he succeeded triumphantly and ahead of schedule, partly owing to his own innate abilities, but also owing to the extraordinary genius and industrial knowledge of his Junior Minister, Ernest Marples. Macmillan held the office until the autumn of 1954 when, for a brief period, he became Minister of Defence, an office which he held for only a few months. But in those few months the decision was taken that Britain should build the hydrogen bomb.

Churchill retired in the summer of 1955. Eden, long heir apparent, began his short reign as Prime Minister, and appointed Harold Macmillan as his successor at the Foreign Office. Macmillan had hoped, and legitimately expected, to hold the position, for which he was temperamentally admirably suited and by his wartime experience more than adequately equipped, for three or four years. In fact, like his tenure of the Ministry of Defence, it was only for a few months. In the wake of Butler's loss of his first wife, Butler retired from the Treasury and by December 1955 Macmillan, much to his regret and only after prolonged hesitation and then only on terms, became Chancellor of the Exchequer. With somewhat typical indiscretion, he remarked to Harold Wilson: 'After a few months learning geography I have now to start learning arithmetic.' Only just over a year later in January 1957 Harold Macmillan was to become Prime Minister.

By a strange paradox, the real hinge of Macmillan's career was brought



about by his extraordinary somersault in the course of the Suez affair. From the time of the nationalization by Nasser of the Suez Canal preparatory to his intended assault on Israel and attempted capture of the leadership of the Moslem world, to the commencement of the Anglo-French operation Macmillan had been, after the Prime Minister himself, the most belligerent of the Cabinet, and from the start had been a leading member of the Committee of Ministers with whom the Prime Minister had surrounded himself. Among the hawks Macmillan was among the most hawkish. There were those who were hawks. There were those who were not. Butler was one of the latter. Monckton was a second. In the Admiralty, the First Sea Lord, Mountbatten, sought to resign during the actual operation, but was prevented from doing so by a direct order from the First Lord, given in writing, to stay at his post, which was afterwards confirmed by the Prime Minister. Macmillan did not share their doubts. He thought that Nasser's action in nationalizing the Canal was a direct and brutal violation of the Treaty of Constantinople (1888), and also, perhaps more importantly, of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, signed only two years before in 1954. On the other side was the Charter of the League (which, however, in article 51, reserved the right of self-defence) and a very general sentiment against military action by western powers against the non-aligned Third World. More importantly, from the point of view of international law, though there was no evidence that Macmillan took it into account, was Nasser's closure of the Straits of Eilat, an international waterway though only a few miles across at the narrowest point and, in the absence of the Suez Canal, Israel's only lifeline. This followed staff talks with the other Arab states bordering on Israel. From that moment onwards it was obvious that Israel would attack by invading the Sinai Desert. At that time Israel could only fight by mobilizing her citizen army and this could only stay in the field for a limited period. Contingency plans under the code name 'Musketeer' had been the subject of joint plans between the British and French since July. In fact it now appears that, in the absence of agreement satisfactory to both parties, both British and French governments were more or less committed to the joint use of force ever since the nationalization of the Canal. The difficulty was to secure the cooperation of the United States, which in the event, and despite the mortal threat to Israel, was not forthcoming. The decisive factor here was the opposition of Eisenhower and Dulles, the extent of which was underestimated at the time by the two allied Cabinets. After it was all over both Dulles (certainly) and Eisenhower (probably) came to realize that their opposition was a serious error in American policy. In spite of American opposition a much modified version of Musketeer was put into effect on 31 October after the Israeli army invaded Sinai on the 29th. The Anglo-French airforces bombed the Egyptian Air Force practically out of existence, and on 5 November British and French paratroops and ground forces occupied Gamil airfield and Port Fuad,



rapidly took Port Said, and advanced along the desert road adjoining the Suez Canal towards Port Suez. Meanwhile, the Israelis had carried out a brilliant operation in the Sinai Desert against forces on paper superior to themselves. There was no doubt that, militarily speaking, victory was complete and Ismailia and Port Suez would have been overrun within a week.

In the event this did not happen. On 6 November the British Cabinet accepted a ceasefire and in effect abandoned the attempt to retake the Canal, the clearance of which they subsequently left to a U.N. force. The reason for this *volte face* was that Macmillan, terrified by a run on the pound initiated by the United States, had changed sides. The hawk had become a decided dove in a matter of days, if not of hours.

The events of the next few weeks are not material to this memoir. They included Eden's illness and retreat to the West Indies, his return and forced resignation. In the Cabinet crisis that followed the choice lay between Butler and Macmillan, and the lot fell on Macmillan, in the circumstances a somewhat paradoxical result. By January 1957 Macmillan had become Prime Minister, an office that he continued to hold until 1963 when a prostate operation compelled him to retire.

Macmillan faced a formidable task on his assumption of office. Despite the tactical victory over the Egyptian forces as the result of the strategic defeat by the U.S.A., British prestige was at a low ebb. The resentment felt in the Arab world at the Suez operation resulted in the destruction of the friendly Hashemite dynasty in Iraq and the murder of the boy king and his uncle Abdulillah. There were difficulties in Jordan that had to be overcome by the dispatch of British planes from Cyprus after a midnight Cabinet meeting, thus saving the other branch of the Hashemite family. But the Canal was not saved. Many in France considered that Albion had once more betrayed her allies, and there is no doubt that, throughout the world, British reputation was badly damaged. In the eyes of some, the operation had been immoral. Others complained that it had not been pushed through with sufficient resolution. Virtually none approved the result.

Above all, the situation at home gave Macmillan cause for concern. Public opinion had been seriously alienated. Government supporters were divided three ways, those, like the late Lord Boyle and Anthony Nutting, who had opposed the operation, those, like the Suez group, who denounced the evacuation, and those, happily the most numerous, who opted to soldier on without much hope despite the difficulties in the way. Opinion polls, then already increasing in reputation, were uniformly adverse. There were many who did not believe that Macmillan's Government would last the year. A series of adverse by-elections appeared to confirm this judgment. Macmillan set himself the task of re-establishing confidence with cool resolution. As his theme, he adopted the motto: 'Quiet calm deliberation disentangles every knot'. His



repeated comment at every adverse turn of fortune was: 'play it long; play it down; play it cool.' There were plenty of these adverse turns to deal with. Salisbury, who with Kilmuir, was in some sense responsible for the canvass of opinion leading to Macmillan's appointment, resigned over Makarios's liberation from the Seychelles and return to Cyprus, and, much later, in 1958, just as things seemed to be taking a turn for the better, the resignation of the three Treasury Ministers (which, rightly or wrongly Macmillan attributed to the 'Svengali' influence of Mr Enoch Powell) seemed to add a new blow to Party unity. It was then Macmillan earned his reputation for 'unflappability' by setting off, apparently unconcerned, on his Commonwealth tour.

Macmillan's strategy in these years was to mend his fences. This he achieved with Eisenhower at Bermuda in March 1957, with the Commonwealth in the summer of 1957 at the Prime Ministers' Conference and, again in 1958, by carrying out his Commonwealth tour despite the Treasury Ministers' resignations, and with the Party by a reorganization at Central Office in the summer of 1957. After toying with the idea of a May election, Macmillan elected to go to the country in the autumn of 1959 and returned with a majority of 100, the third Conservative victory in a row, as dramatic as it would have been unthought of only 18 months before. Apart from Macmillan's share in the partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963, this must be regarded as the peak of Macmillan's career. By sheer courage, diplomacy and tact he had restored a situation of which many had despaired. Only de Gaulle remained unappeased and unimpressed.

The last years of Macmillan's premiership represented a steady decline rather than a dramatic anticlimax. The two success stories were the Cuban crisis, where Macmillan's part consisted simply in keeping his nerve and resisting left-wing pressure to denounce Kennedy's courageous and successful stand, and the Test Ban Treaty of 1963, when Kennedy and Macmillan, acting in joint harness and with admirable perspicacity, negotiated the one, or at least the most important, agreement with Moscow, and stopped altogether the lasting, and potentially lethal, atmospheric tests, particularly the Soviet tests at Novya Zemlya.

During this period Macmillan, employing MacLeod and Maudling as his successive Secretaries of State, accelerated the progress towards enfranchisement of the African colonies, previously designed to be complete by the 1990s. This is still contentious policy, and arguably there was no alternative to the accelerated timetable. But the scheme went badly awry. It was based on a series of attempted federations. The first was in Nigeria, which resulted in the murder of the admirable Abu Bakr, civil war, and a series of military régimes that have continued to this day. The second was in east Africa, which never really got off the ground, and the third in central and southern Africa (comprising what are now Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia), which, after a series of inquiries and



commissions, ended in smoke. No one can call any of these operations successful. The best that can be claimed for them is that failure was unavoidable. Likewise one attempt to join the European Communities failed in the face of the continued French veto, and the alternative policy, embodied in the European Free Trade Association, likewise achieved nothing.

On the home front Macmillan's second government became involved in a series of profitless scandals, real and imagined, connected with the names of Blake, Vassall, and Profumo, who was the victim of a cruel conspiracy by the late Dick Crossman and the late George Wigg, and of a totally ill-advised attempt at damage control by MacLeod, Sir John Hobson, and Profumo's own solicitor. Perhaps the worst of all, and under the pressure to regain the initiative, Macmillan sacrificed the careers of some of the most senior of his colleagues including the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Selwyn Lloyd) and the Lord Chancellor (Lord Kilmuir), with hardly a moment's warning and without adequate explanation. In fact it was Macmillan himself who, for reasons more physical than political (he must already have been more ill than he was aware of or than anyone else suspected), was beginning to fail in judgment. His premiership lasted one further year. He resigned in the middle of the Party Conference in 1963. His last political experiment was his advice from his sick bed to The Queen to send for Sir Alec Home as his successor. This again was a gamble that did not succeed.

The remainder of the story is one of an honoured and respected retirement. Until fairly near the end he retained active control of the family business. His tenure of the Chancellorship of Oxford University was the most universally popular and successful of our time and, unless subsequent incumbents take a leaf out of his book, unlikely to be repeated. His occasional speeches were rightly and enormously admired. He wrote six volumes of autobiography of considerable length. A born, and accomplished, actor he gave a series of television interviews of acknowledged brilliance. He was honoured by The Queen with the Order of Merit in 1976, and, reversing an earlier decision not to accept a peerage, became the first Earl of Stockton in 1984. His speeches in the House of Lords, carefully rehearsed in advance and perforce delivered without a note, because he had largely lost the power of vision, were brilliant, indiscreet, replete with false analogies and *non sequiturs* and universally and rightly admired and applauded. His wife, Dorothy, died shortly after his retirement in 1966. His only son Maurice, also predeceased him. He lies buried near his home at Birch Grove at Horsted Keynes in Sussex where he worshipped regularly to the end. He is succeeded in the earldom by his grandson, Alexander.

The photograph reproduced was taken by Godfrey Argent in 1947.