Life and Writings

of

Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Macaulay was born at Rothley Temple, Leicestershire, in the year 1800. He is the son of the well-known philanthropist Zachary Macaulay, the friend and coadjutor of Wilberforce, in his exertions to put down the slave trade. Zachary Macaulay, having been sent, when a boy, to Jamaica, became so convinced of the iniquity of the system of slavery, that he for many years endured the unhealthy climate of Sierra Leone, in order to aid in ameliorating the condition of the African race and performed services to philanthropy which won for him a monument in Westminster Abbey.

Zachary's father was the Revd. John Macaulay, long a Presbyterian Minister in the Island of Lewis. This John Macaulay and a brother of his, named Kenneth, also a clergyman of a Highland parish, are both mentioned with respect in Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides. A daughter of John, that is, a sister to Zachary Macaulay, married a Mr. Thomas Babington, a rich English merchant, and the name Thomas Babington was bestowed on the nephew. He is, although born in England, of Scotch extraction, the countryman of Robertson, Hume, Smith, Scott, and notwithstanding all the efforts of the English, the Scotch claim this distinguished writer as their countryman by descent.

It has indeed been said that Scotland had little reason to be prond of him, since he has poured so much contempt and obloquy on those heroes of Scotch history whom their national sympathies teach them to respect and reverence, and, when the fourth volume of his History appeared, the Highlanders burned him in effigy to mark the horror of his name. But thanks to the progress of reason in our civilized age, the intelligent part of the community have outgrown the sickly sentiment which once hung round the dynasty of the Stewarts, and sensible Tories as well as Whigs have long ago come to the conclusion that little reverence is due to the memory of Dundee and Montrose. It

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is very grateful to the affection of romantic hearts to lament the sins of the Roundheads and to recount the chivalrous episode of Charles Edward, but every body is now well aware that to the expulsion of his race must be ascribed the peace and prosperity which the Scotch nation now everywhere enjoys. All the offence of Macaulay is to have plainly told the truth. Whatever the Highlanders of the present day may be, it is certain that, during the period of the great Rebellion, their degradation was extreme. They had a strong disrelish for the labours of the field. They had a great contempt of the property of their neighbours. They adopted their politic convictions without any regard to principles whatever. (Hist. ch. XIII.) And that Macaulay does not undervalue the real worth of the Scotch nation, is proved by many passages of his writings. In one place, for instance, he says: "In perseverance, in self-command, in forethought, in all the qualities which conduce to success in life, the Scots have never been surpassed." And elsewhere he bears testimony to the early fruit which love of enterprise, great faculty of labour, and power of perseverance bore, when he says: "Though their kingdom was the poorest in Christendom, it had always vied in every branch of learning, with the most favoured countries. Scots, whose habitation and food were as wretched as those of the Icelanders of our time, wrote Latin verses with more than the delicacy of Vida, and made discoveries in science, that would have added to the renown of Galileo." (Hist. ch. I.)

Macaulay's school days were spent at Shelford, in his nineteenth year he passed to Trinity College, Cambridge. His career at the University was one of great distinction. For two successive years he carried off the chancellor's medal for poems on appointed subjects, entitled "Pompeii" and "Evening." In 1821 he gained a scholarship, in 1822 he graduated Bachelor of Arts and was elected Fellow of Trinity, und in 1825 he graduated Master of Arts. It was here that he laid the foundation of that great classical knowledge and those gigantic stores of general information that have excited the surprise and admiration of the world, and here he contracted that sympathy with academic life which animates his thrilling narratives of the ejection of the fellows of Magdalene College and the degradation of the University of Oxford. (Hist. ch. VIII.)

Macaulay was destined for the bar, and accordingly in 1826, was admitted a member of Lincoln's Inn, but his sympathies, above mentioned, for a quiet academic life and study rendered him rather unsuccessful at the bustling forum, and it was better both for himself and for the world, that he soon afterwards quitted this profession. Six months before he was called to the bar, and when only in his 25 th year, he enriched the pages of the Edinburgh Review by his Essay on Milton. Other articles, on "Macchiavelli" and on "Hallam's Constitutional History" followed, the beginning of that long series of fascinating and instructive essays which are unequalled in English literature and which alone would have given him an undisputed reputation among men of taste and learning.

The Whigs, recognizing the high talent of the young barrister, offered him a Commissionship in Bankruptcy. He accepted the office and continued in it till 1830, when he entered the House of Commons as member for the borough of Calne, and the ministerial service as Secretary to the Indian Board of Control. During the agitation of the Reform Bill he acted a prominent part in defending the general policy of the Grey

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ministry against Peelites, Radicals, and Repealers. In acknowledgment of his parliamentary ability he returned, in 1832, to Parliament as the representative of Leeds, and in 1834, entered upon a new career of life by accepting a seat of the Supreme Council of Calcutta. The object of this mission to India was not so much to assist in the executive of Government as to get up materials for the preparation of a new Code of Laws. During his residence in the East, he sent the "Essay on Bacon" to the Edinburgh Review, and acquired that knowledge which he afterwards gave to the world in his splendid sketches of Lord Clive and Warren Hastings.

Having enjoyed that lucrative post for nearly three years, he returned to England with a fortune which made him independant and enabled him to devote himself entirely to his literary pursuits, re- entered political life, in 1839, as Secretary at War, and was elected Member of Parliament for the City of Edinburgh, in 1840.

The accession of Sir Robert Peel, in 1841, deprived him of his office. He applied himself to the cultivation of the metrical ballad, some specimens of which he had published in his early youth and, in 1842, appeared his famous "Lays of Ancient Rome", containing striking pictures of the life and manners founded on the romantic incidents of Livy's History.

In 1846, when the Whigs under the premiership of Lord John Russel were restored to power, Macaulay became Paymaster-General of the Forces, but in the following year, on the question of Maynooth, he lost his election and returned into private life. His ejection would have been a sorrowful fact for his friends and admirers, if they had not been soon consoled by the intelligence, that he devoted his leisure to the project of writing a history of England. The fruit of his labours appeared in 1849, in the first two volumes of the "History of England from the Accession of James the Second" and after an interval of six years, the third and fourth volume appeared. The excitement and applause which this work produced, not only in England, but in all the civilized world, is certainly without a parallel, and the opponents of his opinions could not but acknowledge with honourable candour, his unquestionable claim on the name of a great historian.

In addition to the gratification of successful authorship, other hononrs had been conferred upon Macauley. In 1849, the students of the University of Glasgow elected him as their Lord Rector. In the same year he became a Bencher of Lincoln's Inn; in 1850 he was appointed to the honorary office of Professor of Ancient History in the Royal Academy, and three years later he received the Prussian Order of Merit. More gratifying still, in 1852, the electors of Edinburgh spontaneously reversed their former judgment and without any solicitations on his part, triumphantly carried him to the head of the poll. In 1857, the Queen placed a coronet on his brow.

No man more than Macaulay seemed to have been surprised by this unlooked-for honour. In one of his letters to Mr. Adam Black he says: "The letter in which Palmerston informed me of the Queen's permission to offer me a peerage took me altogether by surprise. I made up my mind very speedily; but I had, I own, serious apprehensions that Palmerston and myself would be blamed by a large portion of the public. It is, therefore, most gratifying to me to find that both offer and acceptance are generally approved."

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The same correspondence, but of an earlier date, allows an interesting insight in the pecuniary state of Macaulay; he declares: "I am not rich; I am on the point of laying down my carriage, leaving my house, breaking up my establishment, and setting in chambers" (1841); so that it is probable a large portion of the estate that he left — the personality was sworn under L. 80,000 — was derived, besides from his savings in his place in India, from the profits of the History of England.

We are, as yet, little admitted behind the scenes of his domestic life and know little of his character, of the friendships which he contracted, of the judgments which he passed on the men and measures of the time in which he lived himself; but that he was disinterested and generous appears evident from the following circumstance: When Mr. Black commenced the new edition of his Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macaulay promised to send him an article for each letter of the alphabet gratis. This generous offer the noble historian's failing health and various avocations prevented him from fully realising; but he sent five articles to the Encyclopaedia — Memoirs of Atterbury, Bunyan, Goldsmith, Johnson, and William Pitt, the last being the latest finished production from his pen. The first and the last of these productions were after the author's death published in a separate volume by Tauchnitz, while the three others are contained in the Biographical Essays, 1857.

In 1859, England was greatly afflicted by the sad news, that Lord Macaulay had died, at his residence in Kensington, at 8 o'clock on Wednesday evening, Jannary 28th. Although in 1852 he had a serious and protracted illness, from declared disease of the heart, the attack was subdued, and till within the last three weeks his health was tolerably good.

Lord Macaulay was never married and his title died with him. He was only 59 years of age.

In the introduction to his history, the author expressed a hope that he might be enabled to bring down the history of his country "to a date which is within the memory of men still living", but unfortunately this hope is not realized. We should have been most happy, if he had accumulated materials for the continuation of his history down to the time when Lord Mahon begins — the peace of Utrecht 1715 — but this hope proved likewise fallacious.*)

On Monday, January 2d 1860, the great historian was consigned to a fitting place in Westminster Abbey, where are

Living in brass or stony monuments
The princes and the worthies of all sort.

The little spot selected for the resting-place of the man whose fame now fills the world is at the innermost part of Poet's Corner, at the very foot of Westmacott's monument to that genius whom Macaulay delighted to honour — the mild and gentle Addison. It is only the monument, however, which is here, for Addison himself sleeps

*) It is said that Thackeray is about to undertake the difficult task of continuing Macaulay's History. He has long proved that he is a great master of the pen, and as to the materials, he has, by his last novel, sufficiently shown that the events of the epoch are perfectly familiar to him.

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far away from the great Essayist of the 19 th century, in the north aisle of Henry VII's chapel. Almost by the side of the grave of Macaulay rest the remains of Sheridan. By the side of the latter are the graves of Samuel Johnson und David Garrick, while at the foot, and almost overlooking Macaulay's grave is the monument to Campbell, at whose funeral Macaulay was himself a pall-bearer. Close beside it is the Gothic monument to Chaucer, facing which is the slab which was worn out and replaced some time since — which bears the words: "Oh, rare Ben Johnson!" while a little more distant is the monument to Cowley. The graves or monuments of Pope, Prior, Gay, Dryden, Milton, Butler, Mason and others, though all in Poet's Corner, are more distant from that where the poet and historian has been laid to rest.

Those who had the honour to assist as pall-bearers were: The Lord Chancellor, Lord John Russel, the Dean of St. Paul's, Sir David Dundas, the Earl of Carlisle, the Duke of Argyll, the Bishop of Oxford, Sir Henry Holland, Sir G. S. Lewis, Earl Stanhope. At the termination of the funeral service was sung Handel's magnificant hymn "His body is buried in peace, but his name liveth evermore!" —

Macaulay is distinctly known to the world as an Orator and a Poet, as an Essayist and Historian. I am going to make some attempt at estimating his character in the two first capacities.

The elaborate speeches which Macaulay has delivered during his parliamentary career were never intended for printing, which was occasioned only by an unauthorized and thoroughly incorrect publication, and in order not to appear in a false light to the public, Macaulay was forced to publish an authenticated edition. The consideration that many a controversy, long buried and forgotten, should be called to life, that many men to whom he had made a decided and acrimonious opposition, had later shown themselves in a more favourable light, above all Sir Robert Peel, had made him hesisate. On the other hand, it was not possible to alter the expressions and opinions then used, because the Speeches would have lost their original character and ceased to be what they ought to be, historical documents. Other parliamentary orators may, from good reason, dislike any publication of what they have spoken in a long career of public life; they may fear to commit themselves when their former opinions, often changed not only in secondary things, but in matters of the highest importance, are placed before the public — not so with Macaulay, at least not in these speeches. In his earliest Historical Essays, it is true, he has pronounced judgments upon events and persons which, in his later years, he would have expressed in a less energetic and acrimonious style; his parliamentary speeches, however, are written with the greatest self-possession, circumspection, and discretion, they are carefully elaborated, and by their classic perfection of form, their profoundness of thought, their transparent logic, prove Macaulay to be indisputedly the first orator of the English statesmen. He is, howewer, deficient in qualities which fascinate the feeling and the imagination of the hearers, and which are often found in orators far inferior to Macaulay. The faultless excellency, the uncontested brilliancy, and the irrefutable argument gained him the admiration and sometimes the conviction, but not the sympathy of the audience and could never make him popular in his country. It was not an eloquence which "stirred the passions and charmed the imagination" M. The

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Earl of Chatham. He wanted, besides, exterior parts necessary to a public speaker. His figure was by no means comely, his voice was monotonous, his pronunciation disagreeable, and he spoke so quick, that no stenographer was able to follow him. His best speeches, particularly those on the Reform Bill, did not, when delivered, produce that great effect which we should expect when reading them in our private study. He has always been valued and powerful in the deliberations of his party, but never influential with the general opinion of his country.

No greater praise can be bestowed upon him as a poet. On the contrary, his poetical performances are undoubtedly inferior to whatever else he has written. He wanted the power of painting the strong and gloomy passions in which Lord Byron displayed such strength and fertility, the warmth of feeling, the power of imagination, the rare union of wit and sensibility which fill with admiration the reader of Thomas Moore. But his unequalled power of description supplied, in some degree, those necessary gifts of a poet.

One critic of Carlyle's writings says that Macaulay has written many beautiful verses, without being a poet, while Carlyle, though a poet, has not written one good verse — and that is true. Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome are reckoned among the finest flowers of English Poetry, but his impassioned eloquence is merely the language of rhetoric, it expresses no feeling of poetry. Although at home in the vocabulary of poetical phraseology, and painting with the hand of a master the scenes of reality, there is little of deep thought and still less of fancy in the Lays of Ancient Rome. Nothing, as has been well observed, lies beneath the surface of the rapid, dancing, glittering flood of words. What he says of Sir James Mackintosh — History of the Revolution in England, in 1688 — may well be adopted to himself: "He was not gifted with poetical imagination. But that lower kind of imagination which is necessary to the historian he had in large measure. It is not the business of the historian to create new worlds, and to people them with new races of beings. The object of the historian's imitation is not within him; it is furnished from without. It is not a vision of beauty and grandeur discernible only by the eye of his own mind, but a real model which he did not make, and which he cannot alter. Yet it is not a mere mechanical imitation. The triumph of his skill is to select such parts as may produce the effect of the whole, to bring out strongly all the characteristic features, and to throw the light and shade in such a manner as may heighten the effect. This skill he possessed in an eminent degree." But while thus withholding the poetic temperament from Macaulay, and denying him the capacity of unfolding the finer creations of ideal life, we must confess that we cannot read his Lays without experiencing the most rapturous delight. In fire and energy of language, in glowing representations and faithful description, they are, perhaps, not surpassed by any similar composition in the English language.

Much of the interest connected with Macaulay's Lays is unquestionably derived from the feelings which are always mingled with the subject which he has chosen. No events of history are better fitted to arrest our attention and attract our sympathies than the classic memorials of the "Eternal City."

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But not the power of description alone, not the mere skill in handling a popular subject, can account for the high reputation to which they have attained. Their real excellence lies in the high classic inspiration which breathes through every page of them. It is his marvellous faculty of placing himself under the full influence of a situation wholly remote from the ideas and customs of modern life; his reproduction of an age long passed away, his living again, as it were, among scenes remembered only through dim fable, or still more dim tradition. This talent for reproducing the great buried ages of the world creates a fictitious title to his name of a poet.

Shakspeare's scanty knowledge of Greek and Latin is notorious, and it sometimes leads him into historical inaccuracy of detail. But with all his imperfections, no one will ever hesitate to accept him as the truest historian, as the best reflexion of the grand nobility of the patrician character, of the ruthless majesty of that Roman pride which surpassed even the love of kindred and friends. No one would have more happily conceived the tragic grandeur of the fate of Caesar and the lofty patriotism of Brutus and his noble sacrifice on the fatal plains of Philippi.

Lord Byron changes the scene to Greece, and never does his fire of genius kindle with more intensity than when, from the luxurious shades of his Venetian harem, he sings the songs of Marathon and Salamis. And so Macaulay is never more eloquent, more energetic, and more brilliant than when proclaiming the Triumphs of the Roman crowd and sounding the martial strains of the youthful warrior going forth to do battle for his country in defence "of the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his Gods."

I shall conclude these remarks by a short extract of the Lay of Horatius. This ballad is supposed to have been written about the year of the city 360; 120 years after the era which it celebrates, and just before the taking of Rome by the Gauls. Lars Porsena of Clusium has sworn by the Nine Gods to restore the Tarquins and summoned his array all over his dominions. The enemy's van approches the bridge, and Rome is thrown into a state of passionate alarm. Suddenly one of the citizens, Horatius Cocles, undertakes to defend the pass until the bridge is hewn down. His spirit brings two comrades to his assistance, Lartius and Herminius. They maintain their ground against fearful odds. In the mean time the Fathers and Commons have been cutting away the props and planks, and just when the bridge is ready to fall, warn the three to recross. Lartius and Herminius obey the call, but Horatius stands on the other side, alone.

57.

Alone stood brave Horatius,
But constant still in mind;
Thrice thirty thousand foes before,
And the broad flood behind.
"Down with him!" cried false Sextus,
With a smile on his pale face.
"Now yield thee," cried Lars Porsena,
"Now yield thee to our grace."

58.

Round turned he, as not deigning
Those craven ranks to see;
Nought spake he to Lars Porsena,
To Sextus nought spake he;
But he saw on Palatinus
The white porch of his home;
And he spake to the noble river
That rolls by the towers of Rome.

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59.

"Oh, Tiber! father Tiber!
To whom the Romans pray,
A Roman's life, a Roman's arms,
Take thou in charge this day!"
So he spake, and speaking sheathed
The good sword by his side,
And with his harness on his back,
Plunged headlong in the tide.

60.

No sound of joy or sorrow
Was heard from either bank
But friends and foes in dumb surprise,
With parted lips and straining eyes,
Stood gazing where he sank;
And when above the surges
They saw his crest appear,
All Rome sent forth a rapturous cry,
And even the ranks of Tuscany
Could scarce forbear to cheer.

67.

And still his name sounds stirring
Unto the men of Rome,
As the trumpet-blast that cries to them
To charge the Volscian home;
And wives still pray to Juno
For boys with hearts as bold
As his who kept the bridge so well
In the brave days of old.

68.

And in the nights of winter,
When the cold north winds blow,
And the long howling of the wolves
Is heard amidst the snow;
When round the lonely cottage
Roars loud the tempest's din,
And the good logs of Algidus
Roar louder yet within;

69.

When the oldest cask is opened,
And the largest lamp is lit;
When the chestnuts glow in the embers,
And the kid turns on the spit;
When young and old in circle
Around the firebrands close;
When the girls are wearing baskets,
And the lads are shaping bows;

70.

When the goodman mends his armour,
And trims his helmet's plume;
When the goodwife's shuttle merrily
Goes flashing through the gloom;
With weeping and with laughter
Still is the story told,
How well Horatius kept the bridge
In the brave days of old. —

Four years after the first two volumes of Macaulay's History had won the affection and admiration of the world to the author, he published five volumes of Critical and Historical Essays, all of which were, originally, contributions to the Edinburgh Review; they were followed, in 1857, by a volume of Biographical Essays. In accordance with the habit of that Review, these Essays were generally prefaced by the title of some book written on the subject. But we should form a very inadequate idea of their merits, did we suppose that they bore any resemblance to that class of literature which under the name of criticisms is commonly afloat. He used the book criticised simply as a sort of peg, to hang on it a long copious disquisition of his own. And he possesses such a marvellous faculty of recapitulation, such a power of condensing his great stores of knowledge within a very narrow space, that the few pages which he occupies in telling his story, give yon an infinitely better idea of the subject and a more complete command of information, than the ample folios of a more voluminous author.

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Prominent among the many marked characteristics of these Essays is their lofty choice of subjects. Leaving the fleeting questions of the day to other hands, he has fixed his attention on the great men of the past, on those who, in their several spheres, have done something worthy of the remembrance of the world, whose names will survive the "wreck of ages and the crash of empires" and be for ever "familiar in men's mouths as household words." Milton and Byron in poetry, Mackintosh and Bacon in philosophy, Clive and Hastings in history, have all passed before his notice, and in all he is seen to be truthseeking and impartial. Thus in estimating the character of Byron he exposes the popular feeling which, at one time, worshipped him with an irrational idolatry, and at another time, persecuted him with an irrational fury. In his Essay on Bacon he shows how his enemies have wandered from the truth by contemplating only one half of his character, while his friends have wandered equally far by contemplating only the other; he points out very clearly that, if we would know the man as he really was, we must look upon him in a double aspect, both in his study seeking for truth, and in Westminster seeking for the seals.*) And in the splendid Memoir, in which he narrates the history of Warren Hastings' administration in India, he sets forth, on the one hand, the irrational rigour with which the Commons once impeached him for treason, and on the other, the equally irrational servility with which, at a later period, they greeted his casual appearance in the House.

It is superfluous to say anything of the style of these Essays, in addition to the many testimonials already existing in its favour. Besides, a foreigner is seldom a competent judge of the beauty of language. Sir Edward Bulwer, accustomed himself to use his mother tongue in a very elegant manner, styles him the Titian of English prose. Others complain that the reader is in danger of being carried away by the flow of language. Sir Archibald Alison in his "History of Europe from 1815 to 1852" says: "His style, always condensed and pregnant, is sometimes laboured; his ideas often succeed each other too rapidly; the mind of the reader can scarcely keep pace with the rapidity of thought in the writer. Filled to repletion with a succession of striking thoughts and brilliant images, the student of his History sometimes sighs for the repose, even the tedium, of ordinary narrative. The immortal episodes of Livy owe much of their charm to the simplicity of the narrative with which they are environed; the fascination of Scottish scenery is heightened by the long tracts of dusky moor which separate its sequestered glens and glassy lakes."

A recent writer — Men of the Time, London 1857 — has thus criticised the historian's style: "In authorship there is a school exactly analogous to the class of painters who excel principally in effect. Macaulay is the Tintoretto of historians. His touch is singularly free, his colour is rich and deep, and his mind is never fatigued. There is in all that comes from his pen a remarkable facility of illustration, if he rarely produces original thoughts or profound views of life. A more brilliant and interesting writer of English prose could not be named. Macaulay's greatest distinction, considered critically,

*) The moral character of Lord Bacon has recently been justified by the "Personal History of Lord Bacon. From unpublished Papers. By William Hepworth Dixon, of the Inner Temple. London 1861."

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is found in his invention of a new prose style, which is decidedly his own, whatever be its merits or its faults. Without violating the properties of the English tongue, Macaulay has added some peculiar graces to his style, which give it originality, and increase, by the charm of novelty, the power of his effect. Of all the English writers, Macaulay is the most Italianised. If Carlyle thinks in German, Macaulay may be said to compose according to Italian notions of grace. His style has the faults along with the merits of the genius of the Italian tongue. Sentences are softened and lengthened for the beauty of the cadences, as if the sound were fully of as much consequence as the sense. He employs, as the Italians do, too many diminutives and superlatives; and if his style be more musical than his contemporaries', it is much less muscular and nervous than many of them. The merits of Macaulay are the vigour of his manner, his picturesque brilliancy of effect, his airy, animated, and splendid diction. His defects are the profusion of his ornaments, his composition being spangled all over with sparkling sentences and vivid points, and by his constant use of literary artifice. — The critic who would class Macaulay with Hume or Gibbon, would rank Tintoretto with Angelo and Raphael."

If it is a blemish, it may be urged that Macaulay is somewhat too addicted to antitheses, a habit which, while it adds to the pith and vigour of his writings, sometimes secures the result at the expense of the accuracy of his meaning or the equanimity of his judgment. Examples are numerous, less in his History than in his Essays. Many writings have appeared in England to prove the incorrectness of Macaulay's statements on some historical persons, especially on Frederic the Great and William Penn. His representation of the character of the Founder of the Quakers, George Fox has recently likewise been severely attacked.*) A very striking specimen of antithesis we find in the Essay on Frederic the Great. Speaking of the king's reputation of Machiavelli he says: "It was entitled the Anti-Machiavelli, and was an edifying homily against rapacity, perfidy, arbitrary government, unjust war, in short, against almost everything for which its author is now remembered among men." The most striking example of all, perhaps, is given in the Essay on William Pitt. Having related that the governor to whom the academical life of William was confided while at the university of Oxford, was a bachelor of arts named Pretyman, he continues: "A close and lasting friendship sprang up between the pair. The disciple was able, before he completed his twenty-eighth year, to make his preceptor bishop of Lincoln and dean of St. Paul's; and the governor showed his gratitude by writing a Life of the disciple, which enjoys the distinction of being the worst biographical work of its size in the world."

To select out of the countless number those passages which best prove the power and magnificence of Macaulay's style, is a difficult task. I shall content myself with two specimens. In his Essay on the Mémoires de Bertrand Barère, publiés par Hippolite Carnot, he concludes: "It is no light thing, that a man in high and honourable public trust, a man who, from his connexions and position, may not unnaturally be supposed to speak the sentiments of a large class of his countrymen, should come forward to de-

*) One of the writings on this subject, published in 1861, is entitled: An Inquiry into the Truthfulness of Lord Macaulay's Portraiture of George Fox. By John Stephenson Rowntree.

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mand approbation for a life, black with every sort of wickedness, and unredeemed by a single virtue. This M. Hippolyte Carnot has done. By attempting to enshrine this Jacobin carrion, he has forced us to gibbet it; and we venture to say that, from the eminence of infamy on which we have placed it, he will not easily take it down."

And at last I shall give as admirable a specimen of pictural narrative as any language affords: his famous account of the famous trial of Warren Hastings. Having stated, at some length, the impeachment, Macaulay goes on to say: "The place was worthy of such a trial. It was the great hall of William Rufus, the hall which had resounded with acclamations at the inauguration of thirty kings, the hall which had witnessed the just sentence of Bacon and the just absolution of Somers, the hall where the eloquence of Strafford had for a moment awed and melted a victorious party inflamed with just resentment, the hall where Charles had confronted the High Court of Justice with the placid courage which has half redeemed his fame. Neither military nor civil pomp was wanting. The avenues were lined with grenadiers. The streets were kept clear by cavalry. The peers, robed in gold and ermine, were marshalled by the heralds under Garter King-at-arms. The judges in their vestments of state attended to give advice on points of law. Near a hundred and seventy lords, three fourths of the Upper House as the Upper House then was, walked in solemn order from their usual place of assembling to the tribunal. The junior baron present led the way, George Eliott, Lord Heathfield, recently ennobled for his memorable defence of Gibraltar against the fleets and armies of France and Spain. The long procession was closed by the Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshall of the realm, by the great dignitaries, and by the brothers and sons of the King. Last of all came the Prince of Wales, conspicuous by his fine person and noble bearing. The grey old walls were hung with scarlet. The long galleries were crowded by an audience such as has rarely excited the fears or the emulation of an orator. There were gathered together, from all parts of a great, free, enlightened, and prosperous empire, grace and female loveliness, wit and learning, the representatives of every science and of every art. There were seated round the Queen the fair-haired young daughters of the house of Brunswick. There the Ambassadors of great Kings and Commonwealths gazed with admiration on a spectacle which no other country in the world could present. There Siddons, in the prime of her majestic beauty, looked with emotion on a scene surpassing all the imitations of the stage. There the historian of the Roman Empire thought of the days when Cicero pleaded the cause of Sicily against Verres, and when, before a senate which still retained some show of freedem, Tacitus thundered against the oppressor of Africa. There were seen, side by side, the greatest painter and the greatest scholar of the age. The spectacle had allured Reynolds from that easel which has preserved to us the thoughtful foreheads of so many writers and statesmen, and the sweet smiles of so many noble matrons. It had induced Parr to suspend his labours in that dark and profound mine from which he had extracted a vast treasure of erudition, a treasure too often buried in the earth, too often paraded with injudicious and inelegant ostentation, but still precious, massive, and splendid. There appeared the voluptuous charms of her to whom the heir of the throne had in secret plighted his faith. There too was she, the beautiful mother of a beautiful race, the Saint Cecilia whose delicate

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features, lighted up by love and music, art has rescued from the common decay. There were the members of that brilliant society which quoted, criticized, and exchanged repartees, under the rich peacock-hangings of Mrs. Montague. And there the ladies whose lips, more persuasive than those of Fox himself, had carried the Westminster election against palace and treasury, shone round Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire.

The Sergeants made proclamation. Hastings advanced to the bar, and bent his knee. The culprit was indeed not unworthy of that great presence. He had ruled an extensive and populous country, and made laws and treaties, had sent forth armies, had set up and pulled down princes. And in his high place he had so borne himself, that all had feared him, that most had loved him, and that hatred itself could deny him no title to glory, except virtue. He looked like a great man, and not like a bad man. A person small and emaciated, yet deriving dignity from a carriage which, while it indicated defence to the court, indicated also habitual self-possession and self-respect, a high and intellectual forehead, a brow pensive, but not gloomy, a mouth of inflexible decision, a face pale and worn, but serene, on which was written, as legibly as under the picture in the council-chamber at Calcutta, Mens aequa in arduis; such was the aspect with which the great proconsul presented himself to his judges". —

I am now going to offer some desultory remarks on Macaulay's History of England.

The first two volumes appeared in the troublesome times of the year 1849, but were nevertheless received with the greatest applause, and from the first moment created the high interest which the public has ever since taken in Macaulay's writings.

The reason of this universal admiration cannot be found in the materials of the epoch, which has already been described by several able and ingenious historians, and which is, it is true, an interesting, but not at all an heroic time. The quarrels of the Whigs and Jacobites are insignificant when compared with the Thirty year's war, and how mean and base appear the intrigues of the English statesmen in comparison to the brilliant diplomacy of Lewis the Fourteenth. And setting aside King William, we find in all the principal persons no character that deserves our esteem and gains our sympathy. All of them are irresolute, most of them depraved. Therefore neither these facts, nor these characters can explain the unrivalled enthusiasm with which the History was hailed. It is the talent of the writer, his captivating eloquence, his graphic power of description, his profusion of learning combined with his brilliancy of style, which are unparalleled in modern historical literature. His descriptions and portraits are not only detailed, distinct, perspicuous, but vivid and plastic. The influence of the historical novels, particularly those of Sir Walter Scott, is with no historian more evident than with Macaulay. But here we cannot suppress the remarkable fact, that he most carefully avoids to give the great novelist's name. How different from Mahon, who with the greatest pride loves to quote descriptions of events and persons glorified by the skilful hand of his celebrated countryman. Yet it must likewise be confessed that, while Lord Mahon is undoubtedly inferior to Sir Walter Scott in his representation, Macaulay not only equals but even surpasses Scott's power of description.

The first chapter, containing the introduction, is written with a master-hand. We learn, it is true, nothing that we cannot find in Hume and other writers, and yet

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this sketch makes the impression of something new. The reason is that Macaulay, more than any of his predecessors, possesses those moral properties which together with scientific erudition and artistical talent are indispensable to a great historian: an unbounded love of truth, an incorruptible sense for liberty and right, and a well founded patriotism.

The second chapter, however, and still more the third, contain plenty of new matter. The state of England in the year 1685 is, in all its particulars, set before us as amply and fully as never before. The history of 1685 to 1688, vol. I.—III., is treated with such a completeness and prolixity as we only expect to find in monographs or historical novels, and every one must confess that it was impossible for a mortal man to complete the work as far as Macaulay purposed to do — down to a time which is within the memory of men still living. If foreigners may hesitate to declare this completeness to be an advantage for the reader, we must consider this book to be written for the English, who take great interest in the institutions and persons of their country; and we too must be thankful to the author for his detailed account, because better than anywhere else we learn to understand the wonderful and beneficial union of those hostile parties, the Whigs and the Tories who, for an age, had bitterly fought against each other.

Up to the year 1689, the facts develope themselves as in a drama, and the reader remains in expectation and suspense. The events of the following year, however, could not be brought into as favourable a frame. The interest is no more fixed to one final catastrophe and a still greater skill of the historian is necessary to engross the attention of the reader. But, rightly considered, the contents of these volumes are more important.

With the ascension of William, the great combat appeared to have come to a conclusion, but only in appearance, not in reality. The position of the new sovereign was endangered not only by his natural enemies, but by his very friends. It was with great reluctance that the Tories had contributed to the fall of the exiled dynasty; as soon as the imminent danger that threatened their religion, was over, the old sympathies were roused again. Thus a great many conspiracies were plotted, which would certainly have turned out worse, if Charles II. had not been so irresolute and inconsiderate. The Whigs, too, were anything but a prop and support to the new king. They considered the new sovereign as the head of their party and bound, therefore, to rule according to their principles. But, even if William had agreed with all their opinions, he could not have found among them persons able to take the reign of government in their hands. Excluded from the administration of public affairs for many years, they wanted that routine of business which is only acquired in active life. Thus he was obliged to apply for agents and ministers to those men who had held the high offices under the old government. But the corruption of these persons had risen to such a degree as will never be seen in any other epoch. Frivolity, faithlessness, venality were their chief properties. Not mentioning those reprobate adventurers like Ferguson who made conspiracy their business, the greatest statesmen and the bravest generals like Marlborough sold their honour in the most ignominious manner, and we are very much indebted to Macaulay that he stigmatizes the moral depravity of this hero with all the vigour of his powerful pen — chapter 15. That even the law was corrupted from party interest, is proved by the abominable story of Lord Mohun — ch. 19, who, although guilty of a murder, was

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aquitted by his brother Peers. All the branches of administration — Indian affairs, navy, finances — were in the greatest disorder and confusion.

The foreign affairs offer an aspect no more favourable. The most powerful monarch in Europe was the personal enemy of William, and tried all means possible to ruin him. The best proof of this disposition of the French king is the choice of his ambassador, the Count of Avaux, a man of a handsome person and pleasing demeanour and of great diplomatic abilities, but of the worst character. "It is not too much to say that of the difference between right and wrong Avaux had no more notion than a brute. His own indifference to all considerations of justice and mercy was such that, in his schemes, he made no allowance for the consciences and sensibilities of his neighbours. More than once he deliberately recommended wickedness so horrible that wicked men recoiled from it with indignation. But they could not succeed even in making their scruples intelligible to him. To every remonstrance he listened with a cynical sneer, wondering within himself whether those who lectured him were such fools as they professed to be, or were only shamming — Hist. ch. 12.

Lewis found many allies in the very dominions of his adversary. There were, besides the Jacobites, the Irish Catholics and the Highlanders, both of Celtic origin, and both in a state of barbarism similar to that of the Indians. The description of the combats in Ireland and Scotland is written with a rare mastership, The state of the Highlands, the character of their inhabitants, their customs, dwellings, religion is described with the highest excellency — ch. 13.

The conquest of the Highlands, though a bloody one, has proved a real blessing for the conquered, and if the success in Ireland was different, it was not the fault of William.

Considering this state of affairs, we can well conceive Macaulay's deep sympathy for King William who, in spite of his freezing and repulsive manners and the unpopularity resulting from it, made himself master of the situation by his brave character, his prudent consideration, his penetrating understanding, and his inflexible resoluteness — ch. 11.

Macaulay has, from the first moment of his public career, been a decided Whig, yet his opinions have been more and more developed and purified. In his first essays we may call him radical, his love of liberty is mixed with a fierce hatred of all enemies to liberty, and his favourite characters are those energetic men of 1648 whose hearts were filled with fervent hatred against their opponents. This disposition has been allayed and altered by incessant study. He still remained the unmerciful judge of vileness and depravity, he disdained to find out some conciliating qualities in a decidedly base character like that of Charles II., of Jeffries, or Sunderland; but those considerate and circumspect persons who are made to act as mediators between two enraged parties, are criticised with mildness, nay, with predilection. Not Cromwell, but William is the hero of his heart, and even in the delineation of a character like Halifax or Danby, ch. 2, he shows that impartiality which alone is worthy to write down the great events of the past to posterity. He tried to weigh with equal scale, he made good what he stated to be the principal property of the historian, and avoided the reproach which he himself had thrown upon some former writers, Hist. ch. 1, "every source of information as to our early history has been poisoned by party spirit" and

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farther "During a long course of years every Whig historian was anxious to prove that the old English government was all but republican, every Tory historian to prove that it was all but despotic. With such feelings, both parties found what they sought, and both obstinately refused to see anything but what they sought."

A work of such excellent qualities justifies the success which the first two volumes produced. High and low united in the author's praise. Not only the "happy few," but every class of the community, even those who had no pretension to literary taste, partook of the enjoyment and joined in the praise. History had hitherto been placed beyond their reach, but he had written it, as it had been never written before. He had told the national tale so simply and so beautifully. He had descended from graver matters, and while following the course of important events, had not failed to embellish his narrative by a picture of the customs and manners and social institutions of their forefathers. He treated not only of battles and sieges, of the rise and fall of administrations, of intrigues in the palaces, and of debates in the Parliament. He wrote the history of the people as well as of the government, traced the progress of useful and ornamental arts, described the rise of religious sects and the changes of literary taste, pourtrayed the manners of successive generations, and did not disdain to recount the revolutions which have taken place in public amusements, in repasts, in furniture and dress. He fulfilled the duty of the historian as he prescribed it about twenty years before the publication of his History. "History, at least in its ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy. It impresses general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents. But, in fact, the two hostile elements of which it consists have never been known to form a perfect amalgamation; and, at length, in our own time, they have been completely and professedly separated. Good histories, in the proper sense of the word, we have not. But we have good historical romances, and good historical essays. — To make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the society of a great man or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of human flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture, these parts of the duty which properly belongs to the historian have been appropriated by the historical novelist. On the other hand, to extract the philosophy of history, to direct our judgment of events and men, te trace the connection of causes and effects, and to draw from the occurences of former times general lessons of moral and political wisdom, has become the business of a distinct class of writers. — It is remarkable that the practice of separating the two ingredients of which history is composed has become prevalent on the Continent as well as in this country." M. Essay on Hallam.

Macaulay always avoided what he, in his Essay on the Pilgrim's Progress, calls an unpardonable fault, the fault of tediousness, his work was so pleasant, so charming, and so very like a novel, and the admiration which the first volumes excited was a general one.

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Then a reaction followed. "It is a law of nature that such fits of excitement shall always be followed by remissions", says Macaulay himself, Hist. ch. 2. — "He had been guilty of the offence which, of all offences, is punished most sererely: he had been over-praised" — "M. Moore's Life of Lord Byron. Those who had been loud in approbation were soon louder in complaint. Some of his old admirers began to doubt whether he had any genius except for elegant expression; others did not scruple to affirm that even that faculty was not a virtue but a vice. But Macaulay took no notice of the challenge. "He had learned, both from his own observation and from literary history, that the place of books in the public estimation is fixed, not by what is written about them, but by what is written in them; and that an author whose works are likely to live is very unwise if he stoops to wrangle with detractors whose works are certain to die." M. Samuel Johnson. — The echo of these voices resounded in Germany, but soon gave way to a sober and impartial judgment. We allow that his ardour sometimes disturbs his equanimity, that his power of description often clouds the equity of his judgment, that his strong sympathies with the tradition of the great Whig connexion now and then exaggerate his undisguised antipathy for the opponents of his party — but we never hesitate to declare that he has succeeded in placing before the English a true picture of the life of their ancestors, that he has won a high place among modern historians, and that few can peruse his work without gratification. Even the severest critics who take the opposite side of his opinions, do not hesitate to acknowledge the unestimable value of his work. "He is more a brilliant barrister, says Sir Archibald Alison in his History of Europe from 1815 to 1852, than an upright judge", but he confesses that no one can exhibit more of the wisdom of a statesman, or the far-seeing glauce of a philosopher, that he is an accomplished scholar and erudite antiquarian, that he has, at the same time, the brillant genius which can apply the stores of learning to useful purposes, and the moving eloquence which can render them permanently attractive to mankind.

One great secret of the vivid character of Macaulay's descriptions is the zeal with which he visits and makes inquiries in the localities where many of the events took place which he has recorded in his history. At Weston Zoyland, a village in Somersetshire, about four miles from Bridgewater — celebrated as being the scene of the Duke of Monmouth's defeat at the battle of Sedgemore — the historian is well known. He resided at an humble inn in the village for some weeks, occupying his time with minute investigations in the neighbourhood, and writing that portion of his narrative while the facts and impressions were fresh in his mind, in a little room which is still shown there to the rare visitors to the locality.

An untimely death has hindered Macaulay from finishing the task which he purposed. The world hoped that his posthumous volumes would reach as far as 1713, when Mahon's*) History from the Peace of Utrecht to the Peace of Versailles, 1713—1783, begins, this hope proved fallacious. He has, however, at least finished the important epoch of the

*) Now, since his father's death, Earl Stanhope, but more known, at least on the Continent, under his former title "Lord Mahon", which is associated with his literary celebrity.

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English revolution till the death of William of Orange, with the exception of a little interval between the elections of 1701.

In his description of the Spanish War of succession, Macaulay finds for the last time the opportunity of developing all the power of his graphic and fascinating style in drawing the portrait of Charles II. of Spain, the materials for which were already furnished by his Essay on Lord Mahon's War of the Succession in Spain. Essays, vol. II.

The representation of William's death, although an incomplete sketch, is excellent. "He felt, says Macaulay, that his time was short, and grieved, with a grief such as only noble spirits feel, to think that he must leave his work but half finished." Such a sadness and grief must have crept into the historian's mind, and every one will sympathize with this feeling, seeing the fragment of a great work and thinking that it can never be completed.

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