# ТОМАС БАБИНГТОН МАКОЛЕЙ

## MACAULAY'S LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON, WITH A SELECTION FROM HIS ESSAY ON JOHNSON

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## INTRODUCTION

## I. AN INTRODUCTION TO MACAULAY

### (1800–1859)

Before Thomas Babington Macaulay was big enough to hold a large volume he used to lie on the rug by the open fire, with his book on the floor and a piece of bread and butter in his hand. Apparently the three-year-old boy was as fond of reading as of eating, and even at this time he showed that he was no mere bookworm by sharing with the maid what he had learned from "a volume as big as himself." He never tired of telling the stories that he read, and as he easily remembered the words of the book he rapidly acquired a somewhat astonishing vocabulary for a boy of his years. One afternoon when the little fellow, then aged four, was visiting, a servant spilled some hot coffee on his legs. The hostess, who was very sympathetic, soon afterward asked how he was feeling. He looked up in her face and replied, "Thank you, madam, the agony is abated." It was at this same period of his infancy that he had a little plot of ground of his own, marked out by a row of oyster shells, which a maid one day threw away as rubbish. "He went straight to the drawing-room, where his mother was entertaining some visitors, walked into the circle, and said, very solemnly, 'Cursed be Sally; for it is written, Cursed is he that removeth his neighbor's landmark.'"[1]

As these incidents indicate, the youngster was precocious. When he was seven, his mother writes, he wrote a compendium of universal history, and "really contrived to give a tolerably connected view of the leading events from the Creation to the present time, filling about a quire of paper." Yet, fond as he was of reading, he was "as playful as a kitten." Although he made wonderful progress in all branches of his education, he had to be driven to school. Again and again his entreaty to be allowed to stay at home met his mother's "No, Tom, if it rains cats and dogs, you shall go." The boy thought he was too busy with his literary activities to waste time in school; but the father and mother looked upon his productions merely as schoolboy amusements. He was to be treated like other boys, and no suspicion was to come to him, if they could help it, that he was superior to other children.

The wise parents had set themselves no easy task in their determination to pay little attention to the unusual gifts of this lad. One afternoon, when a child, he went with his father to make a social call, and found on the table the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which he had never before seen. While the others talked he quietly read, and on reaching home recited as many stanzas as his mother had the patience or the strength to hear. Clearly a boy who had read incessantly from the time he was three years old, who committed to memory as rapidly as most boys read, and who was eager to declaim poetry by the hour, or to tell interminable stories of his own, would attract somebody's attention. Fortunately for all concerned the lady who was particularly interested in him, and who had him at her house for weeks at a time, Mrs. Hannah More, encouraged without spoiling him, and rewarded him by buying books

[1] Trevelyan, *Life and Letters*, I, 41.

to increase his library. When he was six or eight years old, she gave him a small sum with which to lay "a corner-stone" for his library, and a year or two afterward she wrote that he was entitled to another book: "What say you to a little good prose? Johnson's 'Hebrides,' or Walton's 'Lives,' unless you would like a neat edition of 'Cowper's Poems,' or 'Paradise Lost,' for your own eating?" Whether he began at once to eat Milton's great epic we are not told, but at a later period he said that "if by some miracle of vandalism all copies of 'Paradise Lost' and 'The Pilgrim's Progress' were destroyed off the face of the earth, he would undertake to reproduce them both from recollection."[2]

Prodigy though he was, Thomas was more than a reader and reciter of books. Much as he cared for them he cared more for his home,—that simple, thrifty, comfortable home,—and his three brothers and five sisters. His father, Zachary, did a large business as an African merchant. This earnest, precise, austere man was so anxious for his eldest son to have a thoroughly trained mind that he expected a deliberation and a maturity of judgment that are not natural to an impetuous lad. The good-natured, open-hearted boy reasoned with him and pleaded with him, and whether successful or not in persuading his father, loved him just the same. The mother, with all her love and ambition for him, took the utmost pains to teach him to do thoroughly whatever he undertook, in order that he might attain the perfect development of character that comes alone from the most vigorous training. His sister, Lady Trevelyan, writes: "His unruffled sweetness of temper, his unfailing flow of spirits, his amusing talk, all made his presence so delightful that his wishes and his tastes were our law. He hated strangers and his notion of perfect happiness was to see us all working round him while he read aloud a novel, and then to walk all together on the Common, or, if it rained, to have a frightfully noisy game of hide-and-seek." It was a habit in the family to read aloud every evening from such writers as Shakspere, Clarendon, Miss Edgeworth, Scott, and Crabbe; and, as a standing dish, the *Quarterly* and the *Edinburgh Review*.

From this home, in which he was wisely loved, Thomas was sent to a private school near Cambridge. Then his troubles began. The twelve-year-old boy longed for the one attraction that would tempt him from his books—home life—and months ahead he counted the days which must pass before he could again see the home "which absence renders still dearer." In August, 1813, he urged his mother for permission to go home on his birthday, October 25: "If your approbation of my request depends upon my advancing in study, I will work like a cart-horse. If you should refuse it, you will deprive me of the most pleasing illusion which I ever experienced in my life."[3] But the father shook his head and the boy toiled on with his Greek and Latin. He wrote of learning the Greek grammar by heart, he tried his hand at Latin verses, and he read what he pleased, with a preference for prose fiction and poetry.

When eighteen years old (in October, 1818), Macaulay entered Trinity College, Cambridge. But for mathematics he would have been made happy. He writes to his mother: "Oh for words to express my abomination of that science, if a name sacred to the useful and embellishing arts may be applied to the perception and recollection of certain properties in numbers and figures! … 'Discipline' of the mind! Say rather starvation, confinement, torture, annihilation!"[4] There were prizes, but Macaulay was not a prize winner. He was an excellent declaimer and an excellent debater, and undoubtedly might have won more honors had he been willing to work hard on the subjects prescribed, whether he liked them or not. But he was eager to avoid the sciences, and he was not content to be a mere struggler for honors. He was sensible enough to enjoy the companionships the place afforded. He knew something of the value of choosing comrades after his own heart, who were thoroughly genuine and sincere, natural and manly. Even if, as Mr. Morison says, the result of his college course was that "those faculties which were naturally strong were made stronger, and those

[2] Trevelyan, I, 47.

[3] The entire letter is interesting. See Trevelyan, I, 56. The letters of this period are particularly attractive.

[4] *Ibid.* I, 91.

which were naturally weak received little or no exercise," he wisely spent much time with a remarkable group of young men, among whom Charles Austin was king. Of Austin, John Stuart Mill says, "The impression he gave was that of boundless strength, together with talents which, combined with such apparent force of will and character, seemed capable of dominating the world." And Trevelyan adds, "He certainly was the only man who ever succeeded in dominating Macaulay." Austin it was who turned Zachary Macaulay's eldest son from a Tory into a Whig. The boy had always been interested in the political discussions held in his father's house, a center of consultation for suburban members of Parliament, and had learned to look at public affairs with no thought of ambition or jealous self-seeking. This sort of training, supplemented by his discussions at college, where he soon became a vigorous politician, developed a patriotic, disinterested man.

In the midst of his inexpressible delight in the freedom the college course gave him to indulge his fondness for literature and to spend his days and nights walking and talking with his mates, he continued to remember his family with affection, and did not neglect to write home. On March 25, 1821, he wrote his mother: "I am sure that it is well worth while being sick to be nursed by a mother. There is nothing which I remember with such pleasure as the time when you nursed me at Aspenden. The other night, when I lay on my sofa very ill and hypochondriac, I was told that you were come! How well I remember with what an ecstasy of joy I saw that face approaching me, in the middle of people that did not care if I died that night, except for the trouble of burying me! The sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, are present to me now, and will be, I trust in God, to my last hour."[5]

On the first of October, 1824, two years after he had received the degree of Bachelor of Arts, he wrote his father that he was that morning elected Fellow, and that the position would make him almost independent financially for the next seven years.

In 1824, too, he made his first address before a public assembly,—an antislavery address that probably gave Zachary Macaulay the happiest half hour of his life, that called out a "whirlwind of cheers" from the audience, and enthusiastic commendation from the *Edinburgh Review*. The next year Macaulay was asked to write for that famous periodical, then at the height of its political, social, and literary power. He contributed the essay on Milton and "like Lord Byron he awoke one morning and found himself famous." The compliment for which he cared most—"the only commendation of his literary talent which even in the innermost domestic circle he was ever known to repeat"—came from Jeffrey, the editor, when he acknowledged the receipt of the manuscript: "The more I think, the less I can conceive where you picked up that style."

When Macaulay entered college, his father considered himself worth at least a hundred thousand pounds; but soon afterward he lost his money and the eldest son found the other children looking to him for guidance and support. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, he drew freely on his income from the fellowship and his occasional contributions to the *Edinburgh*. He was the sunshine of the home, and apparently only those who knew him there got the best of his brilliancy and wit.

In 1826 he was called to the bar, but he was becoming more and more interested in public affairs and longed to be in Parliament. In 1830 Lord Lansdowne, who had been much impressed by Macaulay's articles on Mill, and by his high moral and private character, gave him the opportunity to represent Calne—"on the eve of the most momentous conflict," says Trevelyan, "that ever was fought out by speech and vote within the walls of a senate-house."[6] When the Reform Bill was introduced, the opposition laughed contemptuously at the impossibility of disfranchising, wholly or in part, a hundred and ten boroughs for the sake of securing a fair representation of the United Kingdom in the House of Commons. Two days later Macaulay made the first of his Reform speeches, and "when he sat down, the Speaker sent for him, and told him that, in all his prolonged experience, he had never

[5] Trevelyan, I, 102. The letters from college are well worth reading.

[6] Trevelyan, I, 136.

seen the House in such a state of excitement." That not only unsettled the House of Commons but put an end to the question whether he should give his time to law or to politics. During the next three years he devoted himself to Parliament. Entering with his whole soul into the thickest of the fight for reform, he made a speech on the second reading of the Reform Bill which no less a critic than Jeffrey said put him "clearly at the head of the great speakers, if not the debaters, of the House."[7]

Naturally the social advantages of the position appealed to Macaulay. He appreciated the freedom, the good fellowship, the spirit of equality among the members. "For the space of three seasons he dined out almost nightly"; and for a man who at a time when his parliamentary fame was highest, was so reduced that he sold the gold medals he had won at Cambridge,—though "he was never for a moment in debt,"—it was sometimes convenient to be a lion. Yet this "sitting up in the House of Commons till three o'clock five days in the week, and getting an indigestion at great dinners the remaining two," would not have been the first choice of a man whose greatest joy "in the midst of all this praise" was to think of the pleasure which his success would give to his father and his sisters.

In June, 1832, the bill which Macaulay had supported so zealously and so eloquently at every stage of the fight, finally became an act. As a reward the great orator was appointed a commissioner of the Board of Control, which represented the crown in its relations to the East Indian directors. He held this commissionership only eighteen months, however, for as a means of reducing expenses the Whig Government suppressed it. It is to Macaulay's everlasting credit that he voted for this economic measure at a time when his Trinity fellowship was about to expire, and when the removal from office left him penniless.

Impatient to choose the first Reformed Parliament, the great cities were looking about that autumn for worthy representatives. The Whigs of Leeds got Macaulay's promise to stand for that town as soon as it became a parliamentary borough. His attitude toward the electors whose votes meant bread to him was as refreshing as it was striking. His frank opinions they should have at all times, but pledges never. They should choose their representative cautiously and then confide in him liberally. Such independence was not relished in many quarters, but Macaulay answered the remonstrants with even more vigor: "It is not necessary to my happiness that I should sit in Parliament; but it is necessary to my happiness that I should possess, in Parliament or out of Parliament, the consciousness of having done what is right."[8]

His appointment as Secretary to the Board of Control was a help financially, and his return to Parliament by Leeds proved to be of very great assistance. Matters were going smoothly when the Government introduced their Slavery Bill. To Zachary Macaulay, who had always been a zealous abolitionist, the measure was not satisfactory. To please him the son opposed it. In order that he might be free to criticise the bill, simply as a member of Parliament, he resigned his position in the Cabinet, although both he and his father thought this course of action would be fatal to his career. A son whose devotion to his father leads him to such lengths is not always so promptly rewarded as Macaulay was in this instance, for the resignation was not accepted, the bill was amended, and the Ministers were as friendly as ever.

Up to this time he had earned little money by his writing. After giving his days to India and his nights to improving the condition of the Treasury, he could get only snatches of time for turning off the essays which we read with so much care. With a family depending on him he now realized fully the need not of riches but of a competence. He could live by his pen or by office; but he could not think seriously of writing to "relieve the emptiness of the pocket" rather than "the fullness of the mind," and if he must earn this competence through office, the sooner he was through with the business the better. So it was largely for the sake of his aged father, his younger brother, and his dearly loved sisters, that he accepted an appointment as legal adviser to the Supreme Council of India.

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[7] *Ibid.*, 179.

[8] Trevelyan, I, 249–253.

He and his sister Hannah sailed for India in February, 1834. He tells us that he read during the whole voyage: the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil, Horace, Cæsar's *Commentaries*, Bacon's *De Augmentis*, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, *Don Quixote*, Gibbon's *Rome*, Mill's *India*, all the seventy volumes of Voltaire, Sismondi's *History of France*, and the seven thick folios of the *Biographia Britannica*. On his arrival he plunged into the new work. Not satisfied with the immense amount already assigned him, he saw two large opportunities to do more by serving on two committees. As president of the Committee of Public Instruction he substituted for Oriental learning the introduction and promotion of European literature and science among the natives; as president of the Law Commission he took the initiative in framing the famous Penal Code, the value of which must be judged from the facts that "hardly any questions have arisen upon it which have had to be determined by the courts, and that few and slight amendments have had to be made by the Legislature."[9] He worked patiently, yet he longed to be back in England, and it was a great relief when in 1838, his work done, his competence saved, he was able to return. He was too late to see his father again, for Zachary Macaulay had died while the son was on the way home.

In the fall he went to Italy with his mind full of associations and traditions. His biographer says that every line of good poetry which the fame or the beauty of this country had inspired "rose almost involuntarily to his lips." On this occasion he gave some of those geographical and topographical touches to the *Lays of Ancient Rome* "which set his spirited stanzas ringing in the ear of a traveller in Rome at every turn." Much as he enjoyed Italy, he soon began to long for his regular work, and the following February found him in London again. In March he was unanimously elected to *the* Club, and he was making the most of his leisure for books when he felt it his duty to enter Parliament for Edinburgh. "Office was never, within my memory, so little attractive," he writes, "and therefore, I fear, I cannot, as a man of spirit, flinch, if it is offered to me." Without any show of reluctance he was made Secretary at War and given a seat in the Cabinet. To this position the man who had begun life "without rank, fortune, or private interest" had risen before his fortieth birthday. On March 14, 1840, he wrote his intimate friend, Mr. Ellis, a good account of his life at that time.[10]

"I have got through my estimates [for army expenses] with flying colors; made a long speech of figures and details without hesitation or mistake of any sort; stood catechising on all sorts of questions; and got six millions of public money in the course of an hour or two. I rather like the sort of work, and I have some aptitude for it. I find business pretty nearly enough to occupy all my time; and if I have a few minutes to myself, I spend them with my sister and niece; so that, except while I am dressing and undressing, I get no reading at all. I do not know but that it is as well for me to live thus for a time. I became too mere a bookworm in India, and on my voyage home. Exercise, they say, assists digestion; and it may be that some months of hard official and Parliamentary work may make my studies more nourishing."

But the Queen's advisers did not have the confidence of the country, there was a change of government, and Macaulay lost his office. How the loss affected him we may gather from a part of his letter to Mr. Napier, at that time the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*.

"I can truly say that I have not, for many years, been so happy as I am at present.... I am free. I am independent. I am in Parliament, as honorably seated as man can be. My family is comfortably off. I have leisure for literature, yet I am not reduced to the necessity of writing for money. If I had to choose a lot from all that there are in human life, I am not sure that I should prefer any to that which has fallen to me. I am sincerely and thoroughly contented."[11]

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[9] Trevelyan, I, 368.

[10] *Ibid.*, II, 68.

[11] Trevelyan, II, 89.

Carlyle says that a biography should answer two questions: (1) what and how produced was the effect of society on the man; and (2) what and how produced was his effect on society.[12] To the careful reader of Trevelyan's *Life* the words just quoted from Macaulay will give a pretty fair notion of what, up to this time, Macaulay had got from society. The other question, what he gave to society, is perhaps best answered in the account of the remaining years of his life. In Parliament, in society, and in literary and political circles throughout the country there was the feeling that he had won the respect and good will of all, and that he was to do something still greater. What this greater thing was to be was the question that confronted Macaulay for the next few years. Certainly it was not the publishing of his *Lays*, although one hundred thousand copies of them were sold by the year 1875. Nor was it the collecting and reprinting of his *Essays*, although they have given hundreds of thousands of minds a taste for letters and a desire for knowledge. One could hardly call it the delivery of those vehement and effective parliamentary speeches with which he held his audience spellbound, even if one of them did secure the passing of the Copyright Bill in 1842 in practically its present form. But while attending to these other matters, Macaulay had on his mind an undertaking which was destined to satisfy, as far as he carried it toward completion, the hopes of his most enthusiastic admirers. In 1841 he had written to Napier, "I shall not be satisfied unless I produce something which shall for a few days supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies."[13] In order that he might give all his attention to this one project he soon stopped writing for the *Edinburgh Review*; he denied himself no little of the pleasure he had been getting from society; he gave up more parliamentary honors than most others could ever hope to win. At last, in 1848, he published the first volumes of a work that met with a heartier welcome than the English-speaking world had given to any historical work since the coming of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. That these volumes of *The History of England* were the result of a very different kind of effort from that with which Macaulay had dashed off the essays, may be inferred from a sentence of Thackeray's, which Trevelyan says is no exaggeration: "He reads twenty books to write a sentence; he travels a hundred miles to make a line of description."[14] After all critics may say for or against the *History*, it remains to note that Macaulay did what he undertook: he wrote a history that is more readable than most novels.

In other ways we can trace his "effect on society." He was chosen Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow in 1848. Prince Albert tried, but in vain, to induce him to become Professor of Modern History at Cambridge in 1849. He was asked, but declined—urging the plea that he was not a debater—to join the Cabinet in 1852. The same year the people of Edinburgh, ashamed of their failure to reëlect him five years before, chose him to represent them in Parliament. Meantime he had been well and happy. In his journal for October 25, 1850, he wrote: "My birthday. I am fifty. Well, I have had a happy life. I do not know that anybody, whom I have seen close, has had a happier. Some things I regret; but, on the whole, who is better off? I have not children of my own, it is true; but I have children whom I love as if they were my own, and who, I believe, love me. I wish that the next ten years may be as happy as the last ten. But I rather wish it than hope it."[15]

Macaulay may have surmised that the good health which had been such an important factor in keeping him happy would not last much longer. At any rate his last election to the House of Commons was followed by an illness from which he never fully recovered, but through which, for seven years, "he maintained his industry, his courage, his patience, and his benevolence." Occasionally he treated the House to a "torrent of words," but he understood that he must husband his powers for work on books. To protect himself from a bookseller who advertised an edition of his speeches, he made and published a selection of his own, many of which he had to write from memory. Then he continued

[12] *Carlyle's Essay on Burns*, p. 5, Ginn's edition.

[13] Trevelyan, II. 96.

[14] For Trevelyan's evidence, see II, 191.

[15] Trevelyan, II, 244.

his work on the *History*. Some of the time he had to "be resolute and work doggedly," as Johnson said. "He almost gave up letter-writing; he quite gave up society; and at last he had not leisure even for his diary."[16] Yet of this immense labor he said, "It is the business and the pleasure of my life."

As a result of this steady toil the writer secured an enviable influence abroad. He was made a member of several foreign academies, and translations have turned the *History* into a dozen tongues. At home, among the numerous honors, he was presented with the degree of Doctor of Civil Law at Oxford, and made a peer—Baron of Rothley. Naturally before receiving this last honor he had withdrawn from Parliament, and from 1856 to the end of his life he enjoyed a retired home, with a fine garden. He had plenty of time to cash the famous check for twenty thousand pounds which the first edition of the *History* brought him, and to invest and spend it as he pleased. On his fifty-seventh birthday he wrote in his diary, "What is much more important to my happiness than wealth, titles, and even fame, those whom I love are well and happy, and very kind and affectionate to me."

One of the chief sources of his happiness, one to which he was particularly indebted these last days, was his love of reading. He could no longer read fourteen books of the *Odyssey* at a stretch while out for a walk, but in the quiet of his library he enjoyed the companionship of the author he happened to be reading as perhaps few men could. He who could command any society in London failed to find any that he preferred, at breakfast or at dinner, to the company of Boswell; and it seems natural and fitting that he should be found on that last December day, in 1859, "in the library, seated in his easy-chair, and dressed as usual, with his book on the table beside him."

Equally fitting is it that in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, the resting place of Johnson, Garrick, Goldsmith, and Addison, there should lie a stone with this inscription:

**Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay,**

**Born at Rothley Temple, Leicestershire,**

**October 25th, 1800**

**Died at Holly Lodge, Campden Hill**

**December 28th, 1859**

**"His body is buried in peace,**

**but his name liveth for evermore."**

For he left behind him a great and honorable name, and every action of his life was "as clear and transparent as one of his own sentences." His biography reveals the dutiful son, the affectionate

[16] *Ibid.*, 321.

brother, the true friend, the honorable politician, the practical legislator, the eloquent speaker, the brilliant author. It shows unmistakably that greater than all his works was the man.

# II. MACAULAY AND HIS LITERARY CONTEMPORARIES

The very year in which the last volumes of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* were published, 1781, Burns began to do his best work. In 1796 Burns died. In 1798, two years before Macaulay was born, Wordsworth and Coleridge published the first of the *Lyrical Ballads*, which included *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Like Burns, yet in a way entirely his own, Wordsworth was the poet of Nature and of Man, and this little volume was the beginning of much spontaneous poetry which in the following years proved a refreshing change from the polished couplets which had been in fashion. Instead of Pope and Addison and Johnson, in whose time literary men cared more for books than for social reforms, more for manner than for matter, came Scott, Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, Landor, and Southey with their irrepressible originality.

Before Macaulay's day Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett had each contributed something to the novel. During his lifetime came practically all of the best work of Miss Austen, Scott, Cooper, Lytton, Disraeli, Hawthorne, the Brontës, Dickens, Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, Trollope, and Kingsley. George Eliot's *Adam Bede* appeared the year he died.

Other prominent prose writers were Hallam, Grote, Milman, Froude, Mill, Ruskin, and Carlyle. *In Memoriam* and Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* were published in 1850, and Browning's *The Ring and the Book* came out in 1868.

As to Macaulay's relations with his literary contemporaries, it must be understood that he gave practically his whole attention to the times of which he read and wrote, and to the men who made those times interesting. Scientists were making important discoveries day by day, but his concern was not with them, even at a time when Darwin was writing his *Origin of Species*. It was not clear to him that philosophical speculations like Carlyle's might do much to better the condition of humanity. He finished Wordsworth's *Prelude* only to be disgusted with "the old flimsy philosophy about the effect of scenery on the mind" and "the endless wildernesses of dull, flat, prosaic twaddle." Although he read an infinite variety of contemporary literature he said he would not attempt to dissect works of imagination. In 1838, when Napier wished him to review Lockhart's *Life of Scott* for the *Edinburgh Review*, he replied that he enjoyed many of Scott's performances as keenly as anybody, but that many could criticise them far better. He added: "Surely it would be desirable that some person who knew Sir Walter, who had at least seen him and spoken with him, should be charged with this article. Many people are living who had a most intimate acquaintance with him. I know no more of him than I know of Dryden or Addison, and not a tenth part so much as I know of Swift, Cowper, or Johnson."[17] He turned instinctively to the old books, the books that he had read again and again: to Homer, Aristophanes, Horace, Herodotus, Addison, Swift, Fielding. There was at least one writer of fiction in his time to whom he was always loyal. On one occasion when he had been reading Dickens and Pliny and Miss Austen at the same time, he declared that *Northanger Abbey*, although "the work of a girl," was in his opinion "worth all Dickens and Pliny together."

What he did for humanity he did as a practical man of affairs, at home alike in the Cabinet and in popular assemblies. While Carlyle in the midst of his gloomy life was toiling heroically to banish shams and to get at the True, the Real, Macaulay, who was reasonably satisfied with the past and the present, and hopeful of the future, was sifting from his vast treasury of information about the past what he believed to be significant in history and important in literature. He had none of the feeling that Ruskin had, that it was his duty to turn reformer, but what he did toward educating his readers he did in the way he most enjoyed.

[17] Trevelyan, II, 15.

# III. THE STUDY OF MACAULAY

Once for all it must be remembered that Macaulay had no intention of being studied as a text-book, and we must deal with him fairly. First we should read the *Life* through at a sitting without consulting a note, just as we read an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* or the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. We should rush on with the "torrent of words" to the end to see what it is all about, and to get an impression of the article as a whole. As Johnson says: "Let him that is yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last with utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing, let it not stoop at correction or explanation. When his attention is strongly engaged let it disdain alike to turn aside to the name of Theobald and of Pope. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased let him attempt exactness and read the commentators."

Macaulay attracts attention not only to what he says but also to the way in which he says it. In examining his style it will be a good plan to ask ourselves whether the writer ever wanders from the subject, or whether every part of the *Life* contributes something to the one subject under discussion. Naturally we find ourselves making topics, such for example as Johnson's Youth, His Father, At Oxford. A list of these topics gives us a bird's-eye view of the whole field and enables us to examine the composition more critically. Has the writer arranged the topics in the natural order? Does he give too much space to the treatment of any one topic? Might any of them be omitted to advantage?

Having examined the larger divisions, we may profitably turn our attention to the parts which constitute these divisions, the paragraphs. First let us see whether he goes easily from one paragraph to the next. For example, is the first sentence of paragraph 2 a good connecting link with what precedes? In looking through the *Life* for these links, we should make up our minds whether they are studied or spontaneous.

Then let us test the unity of the paragraphs. Can each paragraph be summed up in a single sentence? Does a combination of the opening and the closing sentence ever serve the purpose? Does one or the other of these ever answer of itself? Has every sentence some bearing on the main thought, or might some sentences be omitted as well as not?

It will be equally profitable, at this point, to test the coherence of half a dozen paragraphs. Does each sentence lead up naturally to the next? Can the order of sentences be changed to advantage? When the sentences in a paragraph hold together firmly, we should point out the cause; when coherence is lacking, we should try to discover to what its absence is due.

Then comes the question of emphasis. Let us see whether we can find two or three paragraphs in which Macaulay succeeds particularly well in emphasizing the main point. If we find three, let us see whether he accomplishes his purpose in the same way each time.

For those of us who are still willing to learn something from Macaulay's style, it is worth while to study the sentences. Selecting two or three of the most interesting paragraphs, we may make the three tests: (1) Is each sentence a unit? (2) Is the relation of every word to the adjoining words absolutely clear? (3) Does the construction emphasize what is important?

Then there is the vocabulary. Who does not enjoy the feeling that he is enlarging his vocabulary? An easy way of doing it is to read two or three times such a paragraph as the nineteenth, and then, with the book closed, to write as much of it as possible from memory. As it is not merely a large vocabulary that we wish, but a well chosen one, we shall do well to compare our version with Macaulay's and see in how many cases his word is better than ours. Have we, for example, equaled "winning affability," or "London mud," or "inhospitable door"? Is his word more effective than ours because it is more specific, or what is the reason?

Before taking farewell of the *Life of Johnson* there is another use to which we may put the topics. We may use them as tests of our knowledge of the essay. If we can write or talk fully and definitely on each of the more important ones, we are sure to carry much food for thought away with us. The value of a review of this sort is evident from a glance at the following topics: Literary Life in London in Johnson's Time, Johnson's Love Affair, The Dictionary, The Turning Point in Johnson's Life, The Rambler, Rasselas, The Idler, His Shakspere, The Club [His Conversation], Boswell, The Thrales, His Fleet Street Establishment, The Lives of the Poets.

As we read Macaulay we should be particularly careful to think for ourselves. Mr. Gladstone has said: "Wherever and whenever read, he will be read with fascination, with delight, with wonder. And with copious instruction too; but also with copious reserve, with questioning scrutiny, with liberty to reject, and with much exercise of that liberty."[18]

This means that we must follow him up, find out where he got his information, see whether in his enthusiasm he has exaggerated. Then, even if the critics do assure us that he is not one of the deep thinkers, one of the very great writers, we may go on committing his *Lays* to heart, studying his *Essays*, and admiring those wonderfully faithful pictures in his *History*. More than all else, as the years go by, we are likely to find ourselves indebted to him for arousing interest, for leading us to further reading.

[18] *The Quarterly Review*, July, 1876.

# IV. MACAULAY ON JOHNSON

Among the "hasty and imperfect articles" which Macaulay wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* was one on Croker's Edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson. It appeared in 1831 and gave the writer a welcome opportunity to show the inaccuracy and unreliability of Croker, one of his political opponents. Nearly one half of his space he gave to criticising the editor, and that part it seems wise to omit in this edition; for we care more about Boswell and Johnson. Twenty-five years later, in 1856, when Macaulay had ceased to write for reviews, but sent an occasional article to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he wrote what is generally called the *Life of Samuel Johnson*. The publisher of the encyclopædia writes that it was entirely to Macaulay's friendly feeling that he was "indebted for those literary gems, which could not have been purchased with money"; that "he made it a stipulation of his contributing that remuneration should not be so much as mentioned." The other articles referred to are those on Atterbury, Bunyan, Goldsmith, and William Pitt. One writer calls them "perfect models of artistic condensation."

It is interesting to compare the later work with the earlier: to see whether there is any evidence of improvement in Macaulay's use of English, and whether he gives us a better notion of Boswell and Johnson.

# V. REFERENCE BOOKS

The book to which we naturally turn first to see whether Macaulay knows his subject is Boswell's *Life of Johnson*; not the edition in six volumes by Dr. George B. Hill, scholarly as it is, but some such edition as Mr. Mowbray Morris's, published by the Macmillan Company in one volume. When we read Boswell the first time, to get his conception of his hero, we do not care to loiter on every page for notes, interesting and instructive as they may be after the first rapid reading. This single volume is so cheap that no one need hesitate to buy it; then he may mark it up as much as he pleases and enjoy his own book. The conscientious student need not feel obliged to read every word of every episode, but may feel perfectly free to skip whatever does not appeal to him, perfectly certain that before he has turned ten pages he will stumble on something worth while.

The book which will do more than all others to illuminate the life and character of Macaulay is *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, written by his nephew, G. Otto Trevelyan. Harper & Brothers, the publishers, have bound the two volumes in one which is so inexpensive that every school library may easily afford it. Some critics think this *Life* ranks with Boswell's *Johnson*. It certainly is one of the most readable biographies in the English language. Other useful books are numerous, but among them all Carlyle's essay in reply to Macaulay's *Essay on Boswell's Life of Johnson* stands out first.

## Boswell

Arblay, Madame D'. Memoirs of Dr. Burney. (Contains "the most vivid account of Boswell's manner when in company with Dr. Johnson.")

Boswelliana: the Commonplace Book of James Boswell. London, 1874.

Carlyle, Thomas. Boswell's Life of Johnson.

Fitzgerald, Percy, M.A., F.S.A. Life of James Boswell with four portraits. 2 vols. London: 1891.

Leask, W. Keith. James Boswell. (Famous Scots Series.) Edinburgh: 1897.

Stephen, Leslie. James Boswell (in the Dictionary of National Biography).

## Johnson

Birrell, A. Dr. Johnson (in Obiter Dicta, Second Series).

Boswell, James. Life of Johnson including Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, etc., edited by George Birkbeck Hill, D.C.L., Pembroke College, Oxford, in six volumes. Oxford, 1897. ("Boswell's famous book has never before been annotated with equal enthusiasm, learning, and industry."—Austin Dobson.)

The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., including a Journal of his Tour to the Hebrides, by James Boswell, Esq. New edition, with numerous additions and notes, by The Right Hon. John Wilson Croker, M.P., to which are added … 50 engraved illustrations. In ten volumes. London: 1839.

The Life of Johnson edited by Alexander Napier, M.A., London, 1884, also has several engravings.

Dr. Henry Morley's edition of Boswell's work is illustrated with portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds. George Routledge & Sons, London, 1885.

Brougham, Henry, Lord, F.R.S. Lives of Men of Letters of the Time of George III. London: 1856.

Gardiner, S. R. A Student's History of England.

Gosse, Edmund W. History of Eighteenth Century Literature.

Green, J. R. A Short History of the English People.

Hill, George Birkbeck, D.C.L. Dr. Johnson, His Friends and His Critics. London: 1878.

Hoste, J. W. Johnson and His Circle. London: Jarrold & Sons.

Johnson's Chief Lives of the Poets, Being those of Milton, Dryden, Swift, Addison, Pope, Gray, and Macaulay's Life of Johnson, with a Preface by Matthew Arnold, to which are appended Macaulay's and Carlyle's Essays on Boswell's Life of Johnson. Henry Holt & Company, New York, 1879.

Johnson Club Papers by Various Hands. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899.

Johnsoniana: Anecdotes of the late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., by Mrs. Piozzi, Bishop Percy, and others, together with the Diary of Dr. Campbell and extracts from that of Madame D' Arblay, newly collected and edited by Robina Napier. (Engravings and various autographs.) George Bell and Sons, London, 1884.

Johnson, Samuel. The Idler. In the series of British Essayists.

Lives of the Poets. A New Edition, with Notes and Introduction by Arthur Waugh, in six volumes. Scribner's Sons, 1896.

London. In Hales's Longer English Poems.

The Rambler. In the series of British Essayists.

Rasselas. Leach, Shewell & Sanborn, or Henry Holt & Co.

The Vanity of Human Wishes. In Hales's Longer English Poems and Syle's From Milton to Tennyson.

The Works of Samuel Johnson. In nine volumes. Oxford.

Lecky, W. E. H. History of England in the Eighteenth Century.

Piozzi, Mrs. Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson during the Last Twenty Years of his Life. 1786.

Same, in the cheap National Series. The Cassell Company.

Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. 1788.

Stephen, Leslie. History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century.

Dr. Johnson's Writings (in Hours in a Library, Vol. II).

Samuel Johnson. Dictionary of National Biography.

Samuel Johnson. English Men of Letters Series. Harper & Brothers. (Cloth or paper.)

## Macaulay

Bagehot, Walter. Thomas Babington Macaulay. (In Literary Studies.)

Brewer, E. Cobham, LL.D. Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. The Historic Note-book.

Clark, J. Scott. Thomas Babington Macaulay. (In A Study of English Prose Writers.)

Gladstone, W. E. Gleanings of Past Years.

Harrison, Frederic. Lord Macaulay. (In Early Victorian Literature.)

Macaulay, Thomas B. Critical and Historical Essays, contributed to the *Edinburgh Review*. Trevelyan edition, in two volumes. Longmans, Green, and Co.

The History of England from the Accession of James II.

Works. Complete edition, by Lady Trevelyan, in eight volumes. Longmans, Green, and Co.

Minto, William. Manual of English Prose Literature.

Morison, J. Cotter. Macaulay. (In English Men of Letters, edited by John Morley.)

Pattison, Mark. Macaulay. (In the Encyclopædia Britannica.)

Stephen, Leslie. Macaulay. (In the Dictionary of National Biography; in Hours in a Library.)

Trevelyan, G. Otto. The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay, in two volumes; also two volumes in one.

## London

Besant, Walter. London in the Eighteenth Century.

Hare, Augustus John. Walks in London.

Hutton, Laurence. Literary Landmarks of London.

Wheatley, Henry B. London, Past and Present.

# VI. CHRONOLOGY OF MACAULAY'S LIFE AND WORKS

1800. Born.
1814. Sent to boarding school.
1818. Entered Trinity College, Cambridge.
1822. Graduated as B.A.
1824. Degree of M.A. Elected Fellow. First public speech.
1825. First contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*: essay on Milton.
1826. Called to the bar.
1828. Commissioner of Bankruptcy.
1830. Member of Parliament for Calne. First speech in Parliament.
1831. Speeches on the Reform Bill. Essay on Boswell's Life of Johnson.
1833. Member of Parliament for Leeds. Essay on Horace Walpole.
1834. Essay on William Pitt, Earl of Chatham. Sailed for India as legal adviser to the Supreme Council.
1837. Penal Code finished.
1838. His father died. Returned to England. Visited Italy.
1839. Elected to the Club. Member of Parliament for Edinburgh. Secretary at War.
1840. Essay on Lord Clive.
1841. Reëlected to Parliament for Edinburgh. Essay on Warren Hastings.
1842. Lays of Ancient Rome published.
1843. Essay on Madame d'Arblay. Essay on the Life and Writings of Addison.
1844. Essay on the Earl of Chatham. (The second essay on this subject, and his last contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*.)
1846. Paymaster-General of the Army. Defeated in Edinburgh election.
1848. First two volumes of his History of England.
1849. Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow.
1852. Again elected to Parliament from Edinburgh, although not a candidate. Failing health.
1854. Life of John Bunyan.
1855. Third and fourth volumes of his History of England. (The fifth volume appeared after his death.)
1856. Resigned his seat in Parliament. Life of Samuel Johnson. Life of Oliver Goldsmith.
1857. Became Baron Macaulay of Rothley.
1859. Life of William Pitt. Died December 28.

# VII. CHRONOLOGY OF JOHNSON'S LIFE AND WORKS

1709. Born September 18.

1728. Entered Pembroke College, Oxford. Turned Pope's Messiah into Latin verse.

1731. Left Oxford. His father died.

1735. Married. Opened an academy at Edial.

1737. Went to London.

1738. His first important work: London. Began to write for *The Gentleman's Magazine*.

1744. Life of Savage.

1747. Prospectus of the Dictionary.

1749. The Vanity of Human Wishes. Irene.

1750–1752. The Rambler.

1752. Death of his wife.

1755. Letter to Chesterfield. The Dictionary appeared.

1758–1760. The Idler.

1759. Death of his mother. Rasselas.

1762. Pensioned.

1763. Met Boswell for the first time.

1764. The Club founded.

1765. Made Doctor of Laws by Trinity College, Dublin. Introduced to the Thrales. His edition of Shakspere published.

1773. Spent three months in Scotland.

1775. Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland published. Taxation no Tyranny. Received the degree of Doctor in Civil Law from Oxford.

1779. First four volumes of his Lives of the Poets.

1781. The remaining six volumes of the Lives.

1784. Died December 13.

# LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON
## (*December, 1856*)

1. Samuel Johnson, one of the most eminent English writers of the eighteenth century, was the son of Michael Johnson, who was, at the beginning of that century, a magistrate of Lichfield, and a bookseller of great note in the midland counties. Michael's abilities and attainments seem to have been considerable. He was so well acquainted with the contents of the volumes which he exposed to sale, that the country rectors of Staffordshire and Worcestershire thought him an oracle on points of learning. Between him and the clergy, indeed, there was a strong religious and political sympathy. He was a zealous churchman, and, though he had qualified himself for municipal office by taking the oaths to the sovereigns in possession, was to the last a Jacobite in heart. At his house, a house which is still pointed out to every traveller who visits Lichfield, Samuel was born on the 18th of September 1709. In the child, the physical, intellectual, and moral peculiarities which afterwards distinguished the man were plainly discernible; great muscular strength accompanied by much awkwardness and many infirmities; great quickness of parts, with a morbid propensity to sloth and procrastination; a kind and generous heart, with a gloomy and irritable temper. He had inherited from his ancestors a scrofulous taint, which it was beyond the power of medicine to remove. His parents were weak enough to believe that the royal touch was a specific for this malady. In his third year he was taken up to London, inspected by the court surgeon, prayed over by the court chaplains, and stroked and presented with a piece of gold by Queen Anne. One of his earliest recollections was that of a stately lady in a diamond stomacher and a long black hood. Her hand was applied in vain. The boy's features, which were originally noble and not irregular, were distorted by his malady. His cheeks were deeply scarred. He lost for a time the sight of one eye; and he saw but very imperfectly with the other. But the force of his mind overcame every impediment. Indolent as he was, he acquired knowledge with such ease and rapidity that at every school to which he was sent he was soon the best scholar. From sixteen to eighteen he resided at home, and was left to his own devices. He learned much at this time, though his studies were without guidance and without plan. He ransacked his father's shelves, dipped into a multitude of books, read what was interesting, and passed over what was dull. An ordinary lad would have acquired little or no useful knowledge in such a way: but much that was dull to ordinary lads was interesting to Samuel. He read little Greek; for his proficiency in that language was not such that he could take much pleasure in the masters of Attic poetry and eloquence. But he had left school a good Latinist; and he soon acquired, in the large and miscellaneous library of which he now had the command, an extensive knowledge of Latin literature. That Augustan delicacy of taste which is the boast of the great public schools of England he never possessed. But he was early familiar with some classical writers who were quite unknown to the best scholars in the sixth form at Eton. He was peculiarly attracted by the works of the great restorers of learning. Once, while searching for some apples, he found a huge folio volume of Petrarch's works. The name excited his curiosity; and he eagerly devoured hundreds of pages. Indeed, the diction and versification of his own Latin compositions show that he had paid at least as much attention to modern copies from the antique as to the original models.

2. While he was thus irregularly educating himself, his family was sinking into hopeless poverty. Old Michael Johnson was much better qualified to pore upon books, and to talk about them, than to trade in them. His business declined; his debts increased; it was with difficulty that the daily expenses of his household were defrayed. It was out of his power to support his son at either university; but a wealthy neighbour offered assistance; and, in reliance on promises which proved to be of very little value, Samuel was entered at Pembroke College, Oxford. When the young scholar presented himself to the rulers of that society, they were amazed not more by his ungainly figure and eccentric

manners than by the quantity of extensive and curious information which he had picked up during many months of desultory but not unprofitable study. On the first day of his residence he surprised his teachers by quoting Macrobius; and one of the most learned among them declared that he had never known a freshman of equal attainments.

3. At Oxford, Johnson resided during about three years. He was poor, even to raggedness; and his appearance excited a mirth and a pity which were equally intolerable to his haughty spirit. He was driven from the quadrangle of Christ Church by the sneering looks which the members of that aristocratical society cast at the holes in his shoes. Some charitable person placed a new pair at his door; but he spurned them away in a fury. Distress made him, not servile, but reckless and ungovernable. No opulent gentleman commoner, panting for one-and-twenty, could have treated the academical authorities with more gross disrespect. The needy scholar was generally to be seen under the gate of Pembroke, a gate now adorned with his effigy, haranguing a circle of lads, over whom, in spite of his tattered gown and dirty linen, his wit and audacity gave him an undisputed ascendency. In every mutiny against the discipline of the college he was the ringleader. Much was pardoned, however, to a youth so highly distinguished by abilities and acquirements. He had early made himself known by turning Pope's Messiah into Latin verse. The style and rhythm, indeed, were not exactly Virgilian; but the translation found many admirers, and was read with pleasure by Pope himself.

4. The time drew near at which Johnson would, in the ordinary course of things, have become a Bachelor of Arts: but he was at the end of his resources. Those promises of support on which he had relied had not been kept. His family could do nothing for him. His debts to Oxford tradesmen were small indeed, yet larger than he could pay. In the autumn of 1731, he was under the necessity of quitting the university without a degree. In the following winter his father died. The old man left but a pittance; and of that pittance almost the whole was appropriated to the support of his widow. The property to which Samuel succeeded amounted to no more than twenty pounds.

5. His life, during the thirty years which followed, was one hard struggle with poverty. The misery of that struggle needed no aggravation, but was aggravated by the sufferings of an unsound body and an unsound mind. Before the young man left the university, his hereditary malady had broken forth in a singularly cruel form. He had become an incurable hypochondriac. He said long after that he had been mad all his life, or at least not perfectly sane; and, in truth, eccentricities less strange than his have often been thought grounds sufficient for absolving felons, and for setting aside wills. His grimaces, his gestures, his mutterings, sometimes diverted and sometimes terrified people who did not know him. At a dinner table he would, in a fit of absence, stoop down and twitch off a lady's shoe. He would amaze a drawing-room by suddenly ejaculating a clause of the Lord's Prayer. He would conceive an unintelligible aversion to a particular alley, and perform a great circuit rather than see the hateful place. He would set his heart on touching every post in the streets through which he walked. If by any chance he missed a post, he would go back a hundred yards and repair the omission. Under the influence of his disease, his senses became morbidly torpid, and his imagination morbidly active. At one time he would stand poring on the town clock without being able to tell the hour. At another, he would distinctly hear his mother, who was many miles off, calling him by his name. But this was not the worst. A deep melancholy took possession of him, and gave a dark tinge to all his views of human nature and of human destiny. Such wretchedness as he endured has driven many men to shoot themselves or drown themselves. But he was under no temptation to commit suicide. He was sick of life; but he was afraid of death; and he shuddered at every sight or sound which reminded him of the inevitable hour. In religion he found but little comfort during his long and frequent fits of dejection; for his religion partook of his own character. The light from heaven shone on him indeed, but not in a direct line, or with its own pure splendour. The rays had to struggle through a disturbing medium; they reached him refracted, dulled and discoloured by the thick gloom which had settled on his soul; and, though they might be sufficiently clear to guide him, were too dim to cheer him.

6. With such infirmities of body and mind, this celebrated man was left, at two-and-twenty, to fight his way through the world. He remained during about five years in the midland counties. At Lichfield, his birthplace and his early home, he had inherited some friends and acquired others. He was kindly noticed by Henry Hervey, a gay officer of noble family, who happened to be quartered there. Gilbert Walmesley, registrar of the ecclesiastical court of the diocese, a man of distinguished parts, learning, and knowledge of the world, did himself honour by patronising the young adventurer, whose repulsive person, unpolished manners, and squalid garb moved many of the petty aristocracy of the neighbourhood to laughter or to disgust. At Lichfield, however, Johnson could find no way of earning a livelihood. He became usher of a grammar school in Leicestershire; he resided as a humble companion in the house of a country gentleman; but a life of dependence was insupportable to his haughty spirit. He repaired to Birmingham, and there earned a few guineas by literary drudgery. In that town he printed a translation, little noticed at the time, and long forgotten, of a Latin book about Abyssinia. He then put forth proposals for publishing by subscription the poems of Politian, with notes containing a history of modern Latin verse: but subscriptions did not come in; and the volume never appeared.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.