# THE MARGINAL NOTES OF LORD MACAULAY

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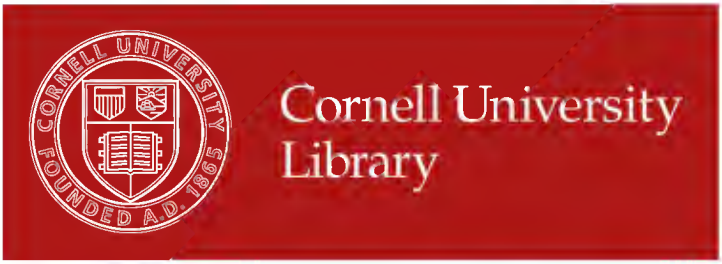
SIR G. O. TREVELYAN



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# MARGINAL NOTES BY LORD MACAULAY

MACAULAY'S library contained many books, of no great intrinsic value in themselves, which are readable, from the first page to the last, for the sake of his manuscript notes inscribed in immense profusion down their margins. He was contented, when the humour took him, to amuse his solitary hours with such productions as Percival Stockdale's memoirs, and the six volumes of Miss Anna Seward's Letters. His running commentary on those trivial and pretentious authors was as the breaking of a butterfly beneath the impact of a cheerful steam-hammer. "Ingenious," (so Miss Seward wrote to a correspondent,) "is your parallel between the elder and the modern Erasmus." "The modern Erasmus," said Macaulay, "is Darwin. That anybody should have thought of making a parallel between him and the elder Erasmus is odd indeed. They had nothing but the name in common. One might as well make a parallel between Cæsar and Sir Cæsar Hawkins." "The chief amusement," wrote Miss Seward, "that the Inferno gives

me is from tracing the plagiarisms which have been made from it by more interesting and pleasing bards than Dante; since there is little for the heart, or even for the curiosity as to story, in this poem. Then the plan is most clumsily arranged:—Virgil, and the three talking quadrupeds, as guides! An odd association!" "What can she mean?" said Macaulay. "She must allude to the panther, the lion, and the she-wolf in the First Canto. But they are not guides; and they do not talk."

The lady, who claimed rank as a Lyric poet, had published what she called a paraphrase of Horace's Odes without knowing a word of Horace's native language. Her version, which is inconceivably bad, was based upon an English translation by the Reverend Philip Francis; and from that time forward she always considered herself entitled to lay down the law on classical questions. "Pleasant Mrs. Piozzi," she said, "is somewhat ignorant upon poetic subjects. She speaks of ode-writing as an inferior species of composition, which can place no man on a level with the epic, the dramatic, or the didactic bard. Now the rank of the lyric poet, as settled by the ancients, succeeds immediately to that of the epic. She ought to know that the Latins place their lyric Horace next

to their epic Virgil, much more on account of his odes than of his satires." "What Latins?" asked Macaulay. "There is not a word of the sort in any Latin writer." Macaulay, who was a purist in spelling, took exception to Miss Seward calling a speech a "Phillipic," and seldom speaking of a pretty girl except as a "Syren;" and he was always greatly puzzled by the references in her letters to her collection of "centennial" sonnets. At length he caught her meaning. "Now I understand. She calls her sonnets 'centennial' because there were a hundred of them. Was ever such pedantry found in company with such ignorance?"

It was worse with French than with Greek and Latin; and worst of all with English. "My conviction was perfect," (Miss Seward wrote to a lady friend,) "that you would all four be delightful acquisitions to each other. I might travel far ere I should find so interesting a *parlé quarré*." "What language is that?" said Macaulay. He was soon to know. A year later Miss Seward received from her friend what she praises as a graceful and sparkling epistle. "It speaks of a plan in agitation to visit me, accompanied by Helen Williams, the poetic; Albinia Mathias, the musical; and Miss Maylin, the beauteous." "So this," ex-

claimed Macaulay, "is the *parté quarré*. She did not know that a *partie carrée* means a party of two gentlemen and two ladies." Macaulay was at some pains to correct Miss Seward's grammar. "Come, my dear Lady, let you and I attend these gentlemen in the study!" That was Miss Seward's report of Doctor Johnson's words. "Nay:" observed Macaulay; "Johnson said *me*, I will be sworn." Miss Seward characterised some sonnets, in the style of Petrarch, as "Avignon little gems." "Little Avignon gems, if you please, Miss Seward!" is the comment in the margin. "So the brilliant Sophia," remarked the lady, "has commenced Babylonian!" "That is to say," explained Macaulay, "she has taken a house in town." "Taste," said Miss Seward on one occasion, "is extremely various. Where good sense, metaphoric consistency, or the rules of grammar are accused of having suffered violation, the cause may not be tried at her arbitrary tribunal." "A most striking instance," wrote Macaulay, "of metaphoric inconsistency. You may accuse a bad writer of violating good sense and grammar; but who can accuse good sense and grammar of having suffered violation?" [1]

[1] Macaulay was never implacable when a woman was concerned,—even a woman who could describe a country-house as an "Edenic villa in a bloomy garden." Miss Seward, after her father's death, gave a friend an

That will serve for a specimen of the manner in which Macaulay diverted himself with the follies of a silly author. A good book was very differently handled. It is a rare privilege to journey in his track through the higher regions of literature. His favourite volumes are illustrated and enlivened by innumerable entries, of which none are prolix, pointless, or dull; while interest and admiration are expressed by lines drawn down the sides of the text,—and even by double lines, for whole pages together, in the case of Shakspeare and Aristophanes, Demosthenes and Plato, Paul Louis Courier and Jonathan Swift. His standard of excellence was always at the same level, his mind always on the alert, and his sense of enjoyment always keen. Frederic Myers, himself a fine scholar and an eager student, once said to me: "He seems habitually to have read as I read only during my first half-hour with a great author." Macaulay began with the frontispiece, if the book possessed one. "Said to be very like, and certainly full of the character. Energy, acuteness, tyranny, and audacity in

account of his long illness. "The pleasure he took in my attendance and caresses survived till within the last three months. His reply to my inquiries after his health was always 'Pretty well, my darling;' and,—when I gave him his food and his wine,—'That's my darling!' with a smile of comfort and delight inexpressibly dear to my heart. I often used to ask him if he loved me. His almost constant answer was, 'Do I love my own eyes?' " "Why," (asked Macaulay,) "could she not always write thus?"

every line of the face." Those words are written above the portrait of Richard Bentley, in Bishop Monk's biography of that famous writer. The blank spaces are frequently covered with little spurts of criticism, and outbursts of warm appreciation. "This is a very good Idyll. Indeed it is more pleasing to me than almost any other pastoral poem in any language. It was my favourite at College. There is a rich profusion of rustic imagery about it which I find nowhere else. It opens a scene of rural plenty and comfort which quite fills the imagination,—flowers, fruits, leaves, fountains, soft goatskins, old wine, singing birds, joyous friendly companions. The whole has an air of reality which is more interesting than the conventional world which Virgil has placed in Arcadia." So Macaulay characterises the Seventh Idyll of Theocritus. Of Ben Jonson's Alchemist he writes: "It is very happily managed indeed to make Subtle use so many terms of alchemy, and talk with such fanatical warmth about his 'great art,' even to his accomplice. As Hume says, roguery and enthusiasm run into each other. I admire this play very much. The plot would have been more agreeable, and more rational, if Surly had married the widow whose honour he has preserved. Lovewit is as contemptible as

Subtle himself. The whole of the trick about the Queen of Fairy is improbable in the highest degree. But, after all, the play is as good as any in our language out of Shakspeare." Ben Jonson, in the preface to his Catiline, appeals from "the reader in ordinary" to "the reader extraordinary" against the charge of having borrowed too largely and undisguisedly from Cicero's speeches. "I," said Macaulay, "am a reader in ordinary, and I cannot defend the introduction of the First Catilinarian oration, at full length, into a play. Catiline is a very middling play. The characters are certainly discriminated, but with no delicacy. Jonson makes Cethegus a mere vulgar ruffian. He quite forgets that all the conspirators were gentlemen, noblemen, politicians, probably scholars. He has seized only the coarsest peculiarities of character. As to the conduct of the piece, nothing can be worse than the long debates and narratives which make up half of it."

Of Pope's Rape of the Lock, Macaulay says: "Admirable indeed! The fight towards the beginning of the last book is very extravagant and foolish. It is the blemish of a poem which, but for this blemish, would be as near perfection in its own class as any work in the world." He thus remarks on the Imita-

tions of Horace's Satires: "Horace had perhaps less wit than Pope, but far more humour, far more variety, more sentiment, more thought. But that to which Horace chiefly owes his reputation, is his perfect good sense and self-knowledge, in which he exceeded all men. He never has attempted anything for which his powers did not qualify him. There is not one disgraceful failure in all his poems. The case with Pope was widely different. He wrote a moral didactic poem. He wrote odes. He tried his hand at comedy. He meditated an epic. All these were failures. Horace never would have fallen into such mistakes." That view is enforced in Macaulay's remarks on Pope's paraphrase of the Ninth Ode in the Fourth Book of Horace.

"Sages and Chiefs long since had birth
Ere Cæsar was, or Newton named.
These raised new Empires o'er the Earth;
And those new Heavens and Systems framed.
Vain was the Chief's, the Sage's, pride!
They had no Poet, and they died.
In vain they schemed, in vain they bled!
They had no poet, and are dead."

"I do not see," writes Macaulay, "the smallest merit in this affected verse, which I suppose was meant to be very striking and sublime. Besides, what in

Horace, like everything in his works, is excellent sense, is false and ridiculous in the imitation. It *is* true that the warriors who lived before Agamemnon are almost utterly forgotten, and excite no interest, while Agamemnon is remembered as Homer's hero. But it is *not* true that the Chiefs who preceded Cæsar, or the Sages who preceded Newton, are forgotten. Nor is it true that either Cæsar or Newton owes his fame to poetry. Every verse, in which either of them is mentioned, might be burned without any diminution of their fame." Horace, again, made a fine and apt allusion to the old song, which Curius and Camillus used to sing as boys in the streets of Rome, telling each other that, if they did right, they would all be kings together. This was how Pope translated the passage:

"Yet every child another song will sing;
'Virtue, brave boys! 'Tis Virtue makes a king.'
* * * *
And say, to which shall our applause belong,
This new Court jargon, or the good old song?
The modern language of corrupted Peers,
Or what was spoke at Cressy and Poitiers?"

Bishop Warburton, with the partiality of an editor, thought Pope's version superior to the Latin original. "Why so?" asked Macaulay. "Horace refers to a real old Roman song which boys sang at play. Pope's

imitation is only an imaginary allusion. Who ever heard an English boy sing that Virtue made kings? And what song to that effect existed at the time of Cressy and Poitiers?"

Macaulay was fond of inditing observations on human character, and on the conduct of life, which have about them a perceptible flavour of autobiography. Swift had pronounced that discretion in statesmen was "usually attended with a strong desire for money, with a want of public spirit and principle, with servile flattery and submission, and with a perpetual wrong judgment, when the owners came into power and high place, how to dispose of favour and preferment." "I doubt this," said Macaulay. "Swift wrote with all the spleen of a man of genius, who had been outstripped by dunces in the career of preferment. Neither my own experience, nor history, leads me to think that the discretion which so often raises men of mediocrity to high posts is necessarily, or generally, connected with avarice, want of principle, or servility. Take as instances Cardinal Fleury, Pelham, the late Lord Liverpool, and the present Lord Spencer."[1] In the "Essay on the Fates

[1] These words were written in July 1835, not many months after the time when Lord Althorp,—in the course of nature, and to the infinite dis-

of Clergymen," Swift related the disappointments of his own career under the transparent mask of the brilliant and unsuccessful Eugenio. "People," wrote Macaulay, "speak of the world as they find it. I have been more fortunate or prudent than Swift or Eugenio." What business, (he then asked, in language of unusual, and quite unproducible, emphasis,) had such men in such a profession?

Edward Gibbon, on an early page of his thrice admirable "Vindication," explains his reason for condescending to notice the attacks upon his History. "Fame," he says, "is the motive, it is the reward, of our labours: nor can I easily comprehend how it is possible that we should remain cold and indifferent with regard to the attempts which are made to deprive us of the most valuable object of our possessions, or, at least, of our hopes." "But what," wrote Macaulay, "if you are confident that these attempts will be vain, and that your book will fix its own place?" Conyers Middleton, in the later editions of his "Free Enquiry into the Miraculous Powers of the Christian Church," remonstrated somewhat querulously with a clerical opponent who had called him an apostate

tress of the Whigs,—was removed from the leadership of the Commons, and translated, as Earl Spencer, into the House of Lords.

priest. "I do not at all admire this letter," said Macaulay. "Indeed Middleton should have counted the cost before he took his part. He never appears to so little advantage as when he complains in this way of the calumnies and invectives of the orthodox. The only language for a philosopher in his circumstances is that of the first great type of all reformers, Prometheus:[1] or, in Milton's words:

> 'To suffer, as to do,
> Our strength is equal, nor the law unjust
> That so ordains. This was at first resolved,
> If we were wise, against so great a foe contending.' "

Macaulay invariably marked his books in pencil, except four plays of Shakspeare,—Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, Midsummer Night's Dream, and Hamlet, —where everything is written with ink, in a neat and most legible hand. He used the twelve volume edition of 1778, illustrated with copious notes by Doctor Johnson, Bishop Warburton, Steevens, and other commentators, whose emendations and criticisms are treated by Macaulay with discriminating, but uncompromising, vigour. On the first page of his Romeo and Juliet he writes: "An admirable opening scene,

[1] "I knew beforehand the penalty which awaited me; for it is in nature that an enemy should suffer at an enemy's hands."—*Prometheus Vinctus*: lines 1040–2.

whatever the French critics may say. It at once puts us thoroughly in possession of the state of the two families. We have an infinitely more vivid notion of their feud from the conduct of their servants than we should have obtained from a long story told by old Capulet to his confidant, *à la Française.* It is bad joking, but in character. The puns are not Shakspeare's, but Sampson's and Gregory's." Opposite the passage about the biting of thumbs is written: "This is not what would be commonly called fine; but I would give any six plays of Rowe for it." Of the scene in the street which begins with Mercutio asking,

> "Where the devil should this Romeo be?
> Came he not home to-night?"—

Macaulay says, "This the free conversation of lively, high-spirited young gentlemen;" and, with referrence to the quarrel at the commencement of the Third Act, he writes: "Mercutio, here, is beyond the reach of anybody but Shakspeare."[1] When, on his way to the

[1] The poet, (wrote Steevens,) appeared to have taken the suggestion of Mercutio from a single sentence in the old story of the Painter's Palace of Pleasure. "Another gentleman called Mercutio, which was a courtlike gentleman, very well beloved of all men, and, by reason of his pleasant and courteous behaviour, in all companies well entertained." "Shakspeare," said Macaulay, "was just the man to expand a hint like this. How much he has made of Thersites, who is nothing in Homer!"

ball-room, Romeo tells Benvolio that his mind misgives

> "Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
> Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
> With this night's revels,"

Macaulay writes: "This as fine an instance of presentiment as I remember in poetry. It throws a sadness over all the gaiety that follows, and prepares us for the catastrophe." At the close of the Third Act he says: "Very fine is the way in which Juliet at once withdraws her whole confidence from the nurse without disclosing her feelings;" and when, in the ensuing scene, the poor child commits her life to the hands of Friar Lawrence, Macaulay remarks on the wonderful genius with which the poet delineates a timid, delicate, girl of fourteen excited and exalted to an act of desperate courage. The respect which he paid to Shakspeare, and to Shakspeare's creations, was very seldom extended to Shakspeare's commentators.

> "Now, afore God, this reverend holy friar
> All our whole city is much bound to him."

"Warburton," writes Macaulay, "proposed to read 'hymn' for 'him';—the most ludicrous emendation ever suggested."

Of the actor's favourite passage, about Queen

Mab and her doings, Macaulay says: "This speech, —full of matter, of thought, of fancy, as it is,—seems to me, like much of this play, to be not in Shakspeare's very best manner. It is stuck on like one of Horace's 'purple patches.' It does not seem to spring naturally out of the conversation. This is a fault which, in his finest works, Shakspeare never commits." "I think Romeo and Juliet," (such was Macaulay's ultimate conclusion,) "is the play in which Shakspeare's best and worst modes of writing are exhibited in the closest juxtaposition. If we knew the precise order in which his pieces followed each other, I am persuaded that we should find that this play was the turning point in the history of that most wonderful and sublime genius. The comic part is almost uniformly good. His comic manner attained perfection earlier than his tragic manner. There are passages in Romeo and Juliet equal to anything in Lear or Othello; but there are also very many passages as poor as anything in Love's Labour Lost. Arimanes and Oromasdes were fighting for him. At last Oromasdes had him all to himself." I well remember how my uncle, in one of his very few conversations which I can clearly recall, bade me observe the contrast between Juliet's reception of what she supposes to be Romeo's death,

and Romeo's reception of the report of the death of Juliet. He quoted to me, in something of a disparaging and ironical tone, the lines:

"Hath Romeo slain himself? Say thou but 'I,'
And that bare vowel 'I' shall poison more
Than the death-darting eye of cockatrice.
I am not I, if there be such an I;
Or those eyes shut, that make thee answer 'I.'"

Opposite these five lines I now find written: "If this had been in Cibber, Cibber would never have heard the last of it." And then he recited, with energy and solemn feeling, the First Scene of the Fifth Act. I can still hear his voice as he pronounced the words:

"Is it even so? Then I defy you, stars!—
Thou know'st my lodging. Get me ink and paper,
And hire post-horses. I will hence to-night."

At the point where Balthazar brings the evil tidings to Mantua, Macaulay has written: "Here begins a noble series of scenes. I know nothing grander than the way in which Romeo hears the news. It moves me even more than Lear's agonies." Of the closing passage in the vault of death he says: "The desperate calmness of Romeo is sublime beyond expression; and the manner in which he is softened into tenderness

when he sees the body of Juliet is perhaps the most affecting touch in all poetry."[1]

"I believe," said Macaulay, "that Hamlet was the only play on which Shakspeare really bestowed much care and attention." Macaulay himself devoted to the examination of that drama as much time and thought as if it had been his intention to edit it. It would be superfluous to re-produce the eloquent expressions of unreserved admiration with which the margin of almost every page is thickly studded. They were written for Macaulay's own satisfaction, and the world can appreciate Hamlet without their aid; but it may not be amiss to present a few specimens of his literary and ethical comments. He regarded the dramatic style of the opening dialogue as "beyond praise;" and he applied the unwonted epithet of "sweet writing" to the passage describing the peace and calm in which the natural world is steeped when

[1] "O, my love! my wife!
Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.
Thou art not conquered. Beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips, and in thy cheeks;
And death's pale flag is not advanced there."

"His comic scenes," (so Johnson wrote in his review of Romeo and Juliet,) "are happily wrought; but his pathetic strains are always polluted by some unexpected depravation." "Surely not always!" said Macaulay. "The first scenes of the fifth act are as near perfection as any ever written."

"that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated."

In the middle of the same scene came something which pleased him less. "The long story," he said, "about Fortinbras, and all that follows from it, seems to me to be a clumsy addition to the plot." Of the royal audience in the room of state, which immediately follows, Macaulay writes: "The silence of Hamlet during the earlier part of this scene is very fine, but not equal to the silence of Prometheus and Cassandra in the Prometheus and Agamemnon of Æschylus." In the Third scene of the same Act, "There is," he says, "perhaps a little too much extension given to the talk of Laertes and Ophelia, though many lines have great merit. But Shakspeare meant to exhibit them in the free intercourse of perfect confidence and affection, in order that the subsequent distress of Laertes might be more fully comprehended. This is a common practice with him, and explains many passages which seem, at first sight, incongruous additions to his best plays." With regard to the strolling player's declamation about Pyrrhus, Macaulay holds that "the only thing deserving of much admiration in the speech is the manner in which it is raised above the ordinary diction which surrounds it. It is poetry

within poetry,—a play within a play. It was therefore proper to make its language bear the same relation to the language, in which Hamlet and Horatio talk, which the language of Hamlet and Horatio bears to the common style of conversation among gentlemen. This is a sufficient defence of the style, which is undoubtedly in itself far too turgid for dramatic, or even for lyric, composition."

The opening of the Fourth Scene in the First Act, on the platform of the Castle at Elsinore, suggests these reflections to Macaulay. "Nothing can be finer than this specimen of Hamlet's peculiar character. His intellect is out of all proportion to his will or his passions. Under the most exciting circumstances, while expecting every moment to see the ghost of his father rise before him, he goes on discussing questions of morals, manners, or politics, as if he were in the schools of Wittenberg." Of the address to Horatio, in the Third Act,—

> "Dost thou hear?
> Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,
> And could of men distinguish, her election
> Hath sealed thee for herself,"—

Macaulay writes: "An exquisitely beautiful scene. It always moved me more than any other in the play.

There is something very striking in the way in which Hamlet,—a man of a gentle nature, quick in speculation, morbidly sluggish in action, unfit to struggle with the real evils of life, and finding himself plunged into the midst of them,—delights to repose on the strong mind of a man who had been severely tried, and who had learned stoicism from experience. There is wonderful truth in this." The marginal note about the conversation between Hamlet and the courtier, in the Fifth Act, runs as follows: "This is a most admirable scene. The fooling of Osric is nothing; but it is most striking to see how completely Hamlet forgets his father, his mistress, the terrible duty imposed upon him, the imminent danger which he has to run, as soon as a subject of observation comes before him;—as soon as a good butt is offered to his wit. The ghost of his father finds him speculating on the causes of the decline of the fame of Denmark. Immediately before he puts his uncle's conscience to the decisive test, he reads a lecture on the principles of dramatic composition and representation. And now, just after Ophelia's burial, he is analysing and describing the fashionable follies of the age, with as much apparent ease of heart as if he had never known sorrow."

Macaulay had much to say about the editors of

Hamlet. Two lines of the most famous soliloquy in the world were printed thus in his copy of Shakspeare:

"Who would fardels bear,
To groan and sweat under a weary life?"

To this passage Doctor Johnson had appended the following note. "All the old copies have to 'grunt and sweat.' It is undoubtedly the true reading, but can scarcely be borne by modern ears." "We want Shakspeare," said Macaulay, "not your fine modern English." Warburton had amended the words of Hamlet, "For if the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion,"—by substituting "god" for "good." "This," said Doctor Johnson, "is a noble emendation which almost sets the critic above the author." "It is," wrote Macaulay, "a noble emendation. Had Warburton often hit off such corrections, he would be entitled to the first place among critics." When Hamlet declined to kill his uncle in the act of praying, on the ground that he would go straight to heaven, Doctor Johnson pronounced that the speech in which "not content with taking blood for blood, he contrived damnation for his enemy, was too horrible to be read or uttered." "Johnson," said Macaulay, "does not understand the character. Hamlet is irresolute; and he makes the first excuse

that suggests itself for not striking. If he had met the King drunk, he would have refrained from avenging himself lest he should kill both soul and body."

Macaulay gave to King Lear as close a study as to Hamlet, and he was moved by it even more profoundly. Before the Third Scene of the First Act he writes: "Here begins the finest of all human performances." He judged Shakspeare's Lear by what to him was a very high standard of comparison,—the masterpieces of that Attic Tragedy which, for several years together, he used to read through, from end to end, yearly. In the Second Scene of the Second Act, opposite Cornwall's description of the fellow who has been praised for bluntness, he writes: "Excellent! It is worth while to compare these moral speeches of Shakspeare with those which are so much admired in Euripides. The superiority of Shakspeare's observations is immense. But the dramatic art with which they are introduced,—always in the right place,—always from the right person,—is still more admirable." When Lear despatches Gloucester on a second message to Regan and her husband,—

"The King would speak with Cornwall. The dear father

Would with his daughter speak; commands her service.
Are they informed of this?"—

Macaulay pronounces the passage superior to any speech of passion in the Greek Drama. He observes how the nonsense of the poor fool about the eels and the buttered hay, "coming in between the bursts of the King's agony, heightens the effect beyond description." And of the appeal to Goneril in the same scene,—

"Now I pr'ythee, daughter, do not make me mad!
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell!"

he says, "This last struggle between rage and tenderness is, I think, unequalled in poetry." When the outraged father breaks forth into the terrible apostrophe commencing

"O, let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks!"

Macaulay writes, "Where is there anything like this in the world?"

If my uncle had been composing literary criticism for the Edinburgh Review he would have been more frugal of his superlatives. But these spontaneous and unstudied expressions of admiration will have a value of their own for those who love great poetry, as indi-

cating the awe and emotion produced upon an impressionable mind, of exceptional power, by the loftiest work of mankind's finest genius. There is ample proof in every act and scene of King Lear that Macaulay's judgment was not asleep, and that his praise was guided by discrimination. With regard to the opening of the play he writes: "Idolising Shakspeare as I do, I cannot but feel that the whole scene is very unnatural. He took it, to be sure, from an old story. What miracles his genius has brought out from materials so unpromising!" Of the quarrel between Kent and Cornwall's steward he says: "It is rather a fault in the play, to my thinking, that Kent should behave so very insolently in this scene. A man of his rank and sense should have had more self-command and dignity even in his anger. One can hardly blame Cornwall for putting him in the stocks." "Albany," said Macaulay, "is very slightly touched; yet, with an art peculiar to Shakspeare, quite enough to give us a very good idea of the man;—amiable, and not deficient in spirit, but borne down by the violent temper of a wife who has brought him an immense dowry. Cornwall is, like Albany, slightly touched, but with wonderful skill. No poet ever made such strong likenesses with so few strokes." In the Fourth Scene of the

Third Act, where Lear insists that his two followers should seek cover from the storm, Macaulay writes: "The softening of Lear's nature and manners, under the discipline of severe sorrow, is most happily marked in several places;" and, where Edgar issues from the hovel, attention is called to the wonderful contrast between the feigned madman, and the King whose brain is beginning to turn in earnest. Doctor Johnson, at the end of the play, made a solemn protest against the unpleasing character of a story, "in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry." Macaulay did not concur in the verdict. "There is nothing," he wrote, "like this last scene in the world. Johnson talks nonsense. Torn to pieces as Lear's heart had been, was he to live happily ever after, as the story-books say? Wonderful as the whole play is, this last passage is the triumph of Shakspeare's genius. Every character is perfectly supported."

Macaulay reckoned Othello the best play extant in any language; but it shows none of his pencil marks. It may well be that he had ceased reading it, because he knew the whole of it by heart.[1] The specimens

[1] Macaulay did not affect to underrate the extraordinary strength of his memory. Bishop Monk wrote of Dr. Bentley: "In the faculty of memory he has himself candidly declared that he was not particularly gifted." "I do not think much of this declaration," said Macaulay. "It

which have already been given of his annotations sufficiently illustrate the spirit in which he always read his poet. Everywhere may be found the same reverential delight in Shakspeare, and the same disrespectful attitude towards Shakspeare's commentators. When, in Antony and Cleopatra, a cloud is likened to a bear or a lion, a castle or a mountain, Steevens considered himself bound to make this observation. "Perhaps Shakspeare received the thought from the Second Book of Holland's translation of Pliny's Natural History: 'In one place there appeareth the resemblance of a waine or a chariot; in another of a beare.'" "Solemn nonsense!" said Macaulay. "Had Shakspeare no eyes to see the sky with?" When the poet, in the Prologue to Henry the Fifth, asks:

> "Can this cock-pit hold
> The vasty field of France? Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?"

shows no candour, for people are rather vain than ashamed of the badness of their memories. I have known people, who had excellent memories, use the same sort of language. They reason thus, The less memory, the more invention. Congreve makes Mirabell say something of this sort." The passage which was in Macaulay's mind may be found in the Way of the World, Act I., Scene 6.

"*Witwoud.* No, but prithee excuse me. My memory is such a memory.

*Mirabell.* Have a care of such apologies, Witwoud; for I never knew a fool but he affected to complain, either of the spleen or his memory."

Johnson remarks that to call a circle an O was a very mean metaphor. "Surely," wrote Macaulay, "if O were really the usual name of a circle there would be nothing mean in it any more than in the Delta of the Nile." The talk at the Boar's Head Tavern between Prince Hal, and Francis the drawer, according to Doctor Johnson, "may entertain on the stage, but affords not much delight to the reader." "It is an excellent scene, by your leave, Doctor:" is Macaulay's rejoinder. Warburton pronounced the first line of the Fool's prophecy, in the Third Act of King Lear, to be corrupt. "Or ere I go," he says, "is not English." "Warburton," (wrote Macaulay,) "had forgotten his Psalter, 'Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns.' And in the Book of Daniel, 'Or ever they came at the bottom of the den.'" Where Lear prays that "cadent tears" may fret his daughter's cheeks, Steevens appends the following note. "*Cadent tears;* that is, *falling tears.* Doctor Warburton would read *candent.*" "More fool Warburton;" said Macaulay.

In the Second Act of Midsummer Night's Dream Oberon bids Puck remember—

"Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,

Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song;
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
To hear the sea-maid's musick."

Warburton maintained that Mary Queen of Scots was the mermaid, "to denote her beauty, and intemperate lust;" that the dolphin was Mary's husband the Dauphin of France; that the rude sea was "Scotland, encircled by the ocean;" and that the stars, which shot from their spheres, were those great English noblemen who had espoused Mary's quarrel. "I do not," wrote Macaulay, "believe that Shakspeare meant any allusion to Mary Queen of Scots. If he did, he was a very bad courtier; for he has alluded only to her charms, and suppressed all allusion to her vices. Who ever heard of the licentiousness of mermaids? And, as to the dolphin, the Dauphin had been king of France, and had been dead, many years before any of the stars shot from their spheres in consequence of Mary's fascinations. I allow that Warburton's theory is ingenious." Later on in Midsummer Night's Dream, in an ironical mood, he directed the attention of the commentators to an historical blunder on the part of the poet. When Hippolyta relates how she had once been out hunting with Hercules

and Cadmus, Macaulay says: "Cadmus had been turned into a snake some generations before Hercules was born. This may be added to the list of Shakspeare's anachronisms." In the Fifth Act of the play he made some amends to Warburton.

"Now the hungry lion roars,
And the wolf beholds the moon."

"As 'tis the design of these lines," wrote Warburton, "to characterise the animals, as they present themselves at the hour of midnight; and as the wolf is not justly characterised by saying that he *beholds* the moon, which other beasts of prey, then awake, do; and as the sounds, which these animals make at that season, seem also intended to be represented, I make no question but the poet wrote:

'And the wolf *behowls* the moon.' "

"In my opinion," said Macaulay, "this is one of Warburton's very best corrections." The passage in the same play, where Theseus describes how even "great clerks" sometimes break down over their orations in the presence of their sovereign, and how their confusion affords a more flattering proof of loyalty than

"the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence,"

pleased Macaulay as much as it pleases every true Shaksperean. "This," he wrote, "is Shakspeare's manly sense, and knowledge of the world, introduced with perfect dramatic propriety. How different from Euripides's lectures on such subjects!" The verses in the Fourth Act,

> "Be, as thou wast wont to be.
> See, as thou wast wont to see.
> Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower
> Hath such force and blessed power,"

he calls "beautiful and easy beyond expression." And on the last page he writes: "A glorious play. The love-scenes Fletcher might perhaps have written. The fairy scenes no man but one since the world began could have written."

Shakspeare's Roman dramas had an especial attraction for Macaulay. Never was a great scholar so little of a pedant. He knew that what Shakspeare could teach him about human nature was worth a great deal more than he himself could have taught Shakspeare about Roman history and Roman institutions. He was well aware how very scanty a stock of erudition will qualify a transcendent genius to produce admirable literary effects; and he infinitely preferred Shakspeare's Romans, and even his Greeks, to

the classical heroes of Ben Jonson, and Addison, and Racine, and Corneille, and Voltaire. Of the conversation in the street between Brutus and Cassius, in the First Act of Julius Cæsar, Macaulay says: "These two or three pages are worth the whole French drama ten times over;" and, in his little essay at the end of the play, he writes, "The last scenes are huddled up, and affect me less than Plutarch's narrative. But the working up of Brutus by Cassius, the meeting of the conspirators, the stirring of the mob by Antony, and, (above all,) the dispute and reconciliation of the two generals, are things far beyond the reach of any other poet that ever lived." He frequently notices the art with which the dramatist turned to account the most slender materials. When Julius Cæsar expressed his preference for having those about him

> "That are fat;
> Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights;"

"Plutarch's hint," (said Macaulay,) "is admirably expanded here." When Steevens reminds the reader that Cleopatra's story of the salt fish on Antony's hook was taken from North's Plutarch, "Yes," says Macaulay, "but how happily introduced, and with what skill and spirit worked up by Shakspeare!" He

keenly appreciated the unerring literary instinct which detected, and exhibited in enduring colours, the true character of young Octavius Cæsar. "It is most remarkable," he writes, "that Shakspeare's portrait of Augustus should be so correct. Through all the flattery of his eulogists, it is easy to see that he was exactly the crafty, timid, cold-blooded man that he is represented here."

Coriolanus was a favourite play with Macaulay; and all the more because it related to a period of history about which, in his view, Shakspeare knew just as much, and as little, as his learned commentators. With reference to the passage where the Tribune Sicinius spoke of the Senate as "our assembly," Warburton wrote: "He should have said *your* assembly. For till the Lex Attinia,—the author of which is supposed by Sigonius, (De Vetere Italiæ Jure,) to have been contemporary with Quintus Metellus Macedonicus,—the Tribunes had not the privilege of entering the Senate, but had seats placed near the door on the outside of the house." "Absurd!" said Macaulay. "Who knows anything about the usages of the Senate, and the privileges of the Tribunes, in Coriolanus's time?" Warburton took still greater exception to the speech of Coriolanus as reported by the Third Citizen.

" 'I would be Consul,' (says he,) 'Aged custom,
But by your voices, will not so permit me.
Your voices therefore! "

"This," observed the Bishop, "was a strange inattention. The Romans at this time had but lately changed the Regal for the Consular Government; for Coriolanus was banished the eighteenth year after the expulsion of the kings." "Well!" wrote Macaulay; "but there had certainly been elective magistracies in Rome before the expulsion of the kings, and there might have been canvassing. Shakspeare cared so little about historical accuracy that an editor who notices expressions, which really are not grossly inaccurate, is unpardonable." In the same scene Brutus says of Coriolanus

"Censorinus, darling of the people,
And nobly named so, twice being Censor,
Was his great ancestor."

Warburton justly remarks that the first Censor was created half a century after the days of Coriolanus. Shakspeare, (he explains,) had misread his authorities, and had confounded the ancestors of Coriolanus with his posterity. "This undoubtedly was a mistake," said Macaulay; "and what *does* it matter?" On the last page he writes: "A noble play. As usual,

Shakspeare had thumbed his translation of Plutarch to rags."

"With regard to Cicero as an author," (so Niebuhr wrote,) "I cannot say anything better than was said by Quintilian,—that the pleasure which a man takes in the works of Cicero is the standard by which we may estimate his own intellectual culture." It was a test which Macaulay was qualified to pass; for he read Cicero's works twice during those three years at Calcutta when he was reading Plautus four times, and Demosthenes thrice. It was all a labour of love. Macaulay read Greek and Latin for their own sake, and not in order to use them for purposes of literary copy. He has left us eight pages, as fascinating as any that he ever penned, about the Phalaris controversy in the Essay on Sir William Temple; and six pages, on the same topic, in the short article on Bishop Atterbury. These twelve or fifteen paragraphs, and the prefaces to the Lays of Ancient Rome, are the sole visible fruit of the thousands of hours which he spent over the classical writers during the last thirty years of his life. His manuscript notes extend through the long range of Greek authors from Hesiod to Athenæus, and of Latin authors from Cato the Censor,—through

Livy, and Sallust, and Tacitus, and Aulus Gellius, and Suetonius,—down to the very latest Augustan histories. They testify to his vivid and comprehensive knowledge of the facts, dates, and personages of the ancient world. That knowledge was acquired, not at second hand from the dissertations of other scholars, but by strenuous and enraptured study of the original books themselves. Macaulay had always in his head the materials, and the thoughts, for an Essay on Greek and Roman history which might have ranked with the Essay on Clive, and with the article in the Encyclopædia Britannica on William Pitt. But it was not so to be; and a Life of Pericles, or a Life of Cicero, are among the unwritten biographies which were buried with him under the pavement of Poet's Corner in the transept of the Abbey.

Cicero's philosophical writings were among the productions of their own class which Macaulay read with the greatest profit to himself. He was favourably disposed towards Cicero's views on the crucial problem of the foundations of morality; for he was an Academician so far as he was anything. Those two parallel lines in pencil, which were his highest form of compliment, are scored down page after page of the De Finibus, the Academic Questions, and the

Tusculan Disputations. "Exquisitely written, graceful, calm, luminous, and full of interest; but the Epicurean theory of morals is hardly deserving of refutation." That sentence relates to the first book of the De Finibus; and for Cicero's exposition of the Stoic theory, as apart from the theory itself, he has nothing but commendation. It is "Trashy sophistry, admirably explained;" or "Beautifully lucid, though the system is excessively absurd." "Fine anointing for broken bones!" he writes, when we are told that the sage, whose child has died, grieves for the possibilities of happiness which his child has missed, and not for his own loss. "Does not a man feel grief," (Macaulay asked,) "when he sends his favourite son to India?" He placed Cicero's treatises on oratory altogether above anything that ever had been written in that department of literature. He greatly admired the theological disputations, and the discussions on omens, prodigies, and oracles. He pronounced the first book of the De Natura Deorum "Equal to anything that Cicero ever did;" and he esteemed the De Divinatione, (and how could he do otherwise?) as among the most curiously interesting of human compositions. Cicero's argument against the credibility of visions and prophecies, in the Second Book of the

De Divinatione, is double-lined in Macaulay's copy. That eloquent display of scepticism, on the part of the most famous and learned professional soothsayer that ever lived, was in his mind when he read Ben Jonson's Catiline.

"*Lentulus.* The Augurs all are constant *I* am meant.
*Catiline.* They had lost their science else."

"The dialogue here," wrote Macaulay, "is good and natural. But it is strange that so excellent a scholar as Jonson should represent the Augurs as giving any encouragement to Lentulus's dreams. The Augurs were the first nobles of Rome. In this generation Pompey, Hortensius, Cicero, and other men of the same class, belonged to the college."

Macaulay had a special liking for the De Officiis, and was in general agreement with Cicero's doctrine of duty; although he protested vehemently whenever the author thought fit to draw his examples of the just man made perfect from Scipio Nasica and Lucius Opimius,—the pair of worthies who murdered the brothers Gracchi.[1] My uncle regarded the De Officiis

[1] That was after Cicero had become a partisan of the aristocracy. As late in the day as his oration on the Agrarian Law he spoke of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus as "two most illustrious men of genius, who were among the very best friends of the Roman people." "I believe," wrote Macaulay, "that when Cicero was adopted into the class of nobles, his tastes and opinions underwent a change, like those of many other politicians."

as a young man's model for Latin prose composition. When I first went to Cambridge he solemnly enjoined me to read it during mathematical lecture, and thereby involved me in a scrape which I had long reason to remember. Even for Cicero's poetry Macaulay had enough respect to distinguish carefully between the bad, and the less bad. Whatever that praise may be worth, he characterises the translations from Æschylus and Sophocles in the Second Book of the Tusculan Disputations as "Cicero's best." He enjoyed and valued Cicero's Letters to a degree that he found difficult to express. The document which he most admired, in the whole collection of the correspondence, was Cæsar's answer to Cicero's message of gratitude for the humanity which the conqueror had displayed towards those political adversaries who had fallen into his power at the surrender of Corfinium. It contained, (so Macaulay used to say,) the finest sentence ever written. "Meum factum probari abs te, triumpho, gaudeo. *Neque illud me movet quod ii, qui me dimissi sunt, discessisse dicuntur ut mihi rursus bellum inferrent; nihil enim malo quam et me mei similem esse, et illos sui.*"[1] Opposite that sentence appear the words: "Noble fellow!"

[1] "I triumph and rejoice that my action should have obtained your

Macaulay's pencilled observations upon each successive speech of Cicero form a continuous history of the great orator's public career, and a far from unsympathetic analysis of his mobile, and singularly interesting, character. The early efforts of the young advocate were mainly directed to the defence and rescue of quiet citizens from the rapacity and cruelty of Sulla's partisans. Of the oration on behalf of Quintius, delivered when Cicero was only six and twenty, Macaulay writes: "I like this speech better than any of the Greek speeches in mere private cases. It would in any age produce a prodigious effect on any tribunal. It would seem that the confusion of the times, and the speedy ways of getting rich which the proscriptions had opened to cupidity, had destroyed all feeling of honour and honesty in many minds." He considered the oration for Roscius of Ameria, with its exposure of the villanies perpetrated by Sulla's freedman, the infamous Chrysogonus, as more creditable to Cicero's heart than any that he ever made. "I cannot," he said, "help thinking that he strengthened the language after Sulla's resignation. But,

approval. *Nor am I disturbed when I hear it said that those, whom I have sent off alive and free, will again bear arms against me; for there is nothing which I so much covet as that I should be like myself and they like themselves.*"

after making full allowance for re-touching, it is impossible to deny that he performed a bold service to humanity and to his country. Si sic omnia!" With regard to the first, and shorter, oration against Verres, Macaulay remarks: "There is great force about this speech. Cicero had not attained that perfect mastery of the whole art of rhetoric which he possessed at a later period. But on the other hand there is a freedom, a boldness, a zeal for popular rights, a scorn of the vicious and insolent gang whom he afterwards called the *boni*, which makes these early speeches more pleasing than the later. Flattery,—and, after his exile, cowardice,—destroyed all that was generous and elevated in his mind." Of the Third Section of the Second Oration he says: "A very powerful speech indeed. It makes my blood boil, less against Verres than against the detestable system of government which Cicero was so desirous to uphold, though he himself was not an accomplice in the crimes which were inseparable from it."

It was Macaulay's fixed belief that the debate on the punishment of the Catilinarian conspirators was a fateful crisis in Cicero's history. Cæsar had almost persuaded the Senate to refrain from sending Roman citizens to a violent and illegal death, when Cicero the

Consul,—in an evil hour for his fame, and still more for his happiness,—raised his voice against the policy of clemency and self-control. "Fine declamation:" said Macaulay. "But it is no answer to Cæsar's admirable speech. This was the turning point of Cicero's life. He was a new man, and a popular man. Till his Consulship he had always leaned against the Optimates. He had defended Sulla's victims. He had brought Verres to justice in spite of strong aristocratical protection. He had always spoken handsomely of the Gracchi, and other heroes of the democratic party. He appears, when he became Consul, to have been very much liked by the multitude, and much distrusted by the nobles. But the peculiar circumstances in which he now was placed rendered it his duty to take the side of the aristocracy on some important questions. He supported them on the Agrarian Law. He also took vigorous measures against Catiline. They began to coax and flatter him. He went further. He was hurried by adulation, vanity, and vindictive feeling into a highly unconstitutional act in favour of the nobles. He followed, with more excuse indeed, the odious example set by Scipio Nasica and by Opimius. From that time he was an instrument in the hands of the grandees, whom he hated

and despised: and who fully returned his hatred, and despised, not his talents indeed, but his character." Cicero, and his new political allies, had very little in common. At a serious crisis in Roman history he told Atticus that the leaders of the aristocratic party cared nothing about the ruin of the Republic as long as their fish-ponds were safe, and believed themselves to have attained celestial honours if they had great mullets which came up to be fed by hand. "These," said Macaulay, "are your *boni!*" and on a later occasion my uncle remarks, in caustic language, on the circumstance that the most creditable act of Cicero's official career was his effort to protect the miserable provincials of Cyprus from the cruelty and rapacity of no less a Senator than Marcus Brutus. Cicero's opinion of the nobles went steadily down as his experience of them grew more intimate. The time came when he confided to Atticus that they were altogether insupportable. "I cannot endure," he said, "to be the object of their sneering talk. They certainly do not merit their name of *boni.*" "You have found it out at last!" wrote Macaulay.[1]

That was the precise point at which Cicero's usefulness as a statesman and a patriot declined, and his

[1] Cicero to Atticus; Book II. Letter 1; VI. 1; IX. 2.

misfortunes began. His nerve and courage were impaired, and he surrendered his political independence to bolder and stronger men. "Cæsar and Pompey," said Macaulay, "liked Cicero personally, it should seem; but they saw that he was inclined to disturb their coalition. Accordingly they let Clodius loose upon him; connived at his being banished; fairly frightened him; and when they now saw that he had been rendered thoroughly tractable, they recalled him home. The struggle in poor Cicero's mind between fear and self-importance is one which all his great powers are quite unable to disguise." Under cruel pressure, from both Pompey and Cæsar, Cicero was reluctantly induced to appear in court on behalf of Gabinius—a man, (so he complained to Atticus,) whose presence in the Roman Senate was a personal disgrace to all his colleagues.[1] "After having stooped to defend Gabinius," wrote Macaulay, "he might well bear to sit with him." "My motive," (Cicero once said in public,) "for defending Gabinius was the desire to make up the quarrel between us; for I never repent of behaving as if my enmities were transient, and my friendships eternal." "A fine sentence," (said Macaulay,) "quoted very happily by Fox. But

[1] Cicero to Atticus, X. 8.

poor Cicero was ready to sink into the earth with shame, though he tried to put a good face on the matter." "Meanwhile," said Macaulay, "it is easy to perceive that the vice of egotism was now rapidly growing on Cicero. He had attained the highest point of power which he ever reached, and his head was undoubtedly a little turned by his elevation. Afterwards this vile habit tainted his speaking and writing, so as to make much of his finest rhetoric almost disgusting. He gave himself airs, on all occasions, which, as Plutarch tells us, made him generally odious, and were the real cause of his exile." My uncle describes the speech for the poet Archias, with its exquisitely worded encomium on the delights of literature, as a magnificent composition, blemished as usual by insufferable egotism. "What unhappy madness," he says, "led Cicero always to talk of himself?" And of the attack of Piso in the Senate he writes, "A splendid invective certainly, but he was really mad with vanity." "The defence of Sextius is very interesting. Indeed those parts of the speech, which seem most out of place in a forensic address, are historically the most valuable. Cicero doubtless knew that his client was safe, and that the judges were all Optimates; and so he ventured to luxuriate in narratives and disquisi-

tions not very closely connected with the subject." The tribute of adulation which, in the course of that speech, the orator paid to the degenerate aristocracy of the later Republic angered his reader as he seldom had been angered by any passage in literature. When Cicero asked what sort of men were these *Optimates*, who so well deserved their honourable title, Macaulay replied that they were "the murderers of the Gracchi, the hirelings of Jugurtha, the butchers of Sulla, the plunderers of the provinces, the buyers and sellers of magistracies,—such men as Opimius, and Scaurus, Domitius Ahenobarbus and Caius Verres."[1]

In his comments on the Epistles to Atticus Macaulay's sympathy with their author is more conspicuous than in his comments on the Speeches. When Cicero confesses, at the end of a letter the contents of which otherwise do him little credit, that the loss of his reader Sositheus, whom he calls a charming lad, had distressed him more than the death of a slave

[1] While Macaulay was severe upon these ancient Romans, he did not spare himself whenever he had been betrayed into an error of literary judgment. He makes these two successive entries with reference to the oration for Marcus Marcellus.

"A splendid and highly finished declamation; but, taken in connection with Cicero's letters written at the time, it does little honour to his character. September 27, 1835."

"It does him neither honour nor dishonour. For it is not his. March 17, 1856."

might be thought to justify, Macaulay writes: "A kind-hearted man, with all his faults." When the unhappy ex-Consul complained that he had been rudely expelled from on board the ship of state, and relegated against his will, and before his time, to the haven of literary leisure; "Poor fellow!" said Macaulay. "He had not the firmness to do what he felt to be necessary for his peace." And when the darkness gathered round Cicero, and a sense of impending danger filled the air;—when Atticus was absent from Rome, and amidst a crowd of flatterers and clients he had not a single friend with whom he could exchange a word of confidence; and when he found comfort nowhere except in the privacy of family life, with his darling Tulliola, and his "sweet little Cicero";—the narrative of his sorrows and anxieties seemed to Macaulay "As exquisitely beautiful a passage as ever was written." The melancholy letters sent home to Atticus from Illyria and Macedonia during the period of Cicero's banishment suggested the following reflections to the English statesman at Calcutta. "Poor fellow! He makes a pitiful figure. But it is impossible not to feel for him. Since I left England I have not despised Cicero and Ovid for their lamentations in exile as much as I did." That was a curi-

ous illustration of character in the case of a brilliant and successful man of four and thirty, who had gone to India for a very few years in order to secure a competence, and fill a most important and dignified office. When Cicero tells his friend how, on his return from exile, he was welcomed home by the entire population of the city, "That day," said Macaulay, "was indeed worth a life to a man so sensitive, and so passionately fond of glory." In the Twelfth Letter of the Ninth Book is the passage commencing, "Cneius Pompeius is blockaded by a Roman army. He is enclosed, and held captive, within a wall of circumvallation built by Roman hands. And I live, and the city stands! And the Prætors deliver their judgments, and the Ædiles prepare to hold the public games, and wealthy men calmly reckon up the value of their investments!" "Very fine writing, certainly;" Macaulay says. "I like some of the letters in this book as much as any of Cicero's compositions."[1]

After Cæsar's death Cicero emerged from a period of retirement and irksome silence; and the third and last phase of his oratory commenced. Macaulay styles the Second Philippic "a most wonderful display of rhetorical talent, worthy of all its fame."

[1] Cicero to Atticus, I. 12; II. 7; I. 18; III. 13; IV. 1.

With regard to the Third Philippic he writes: "The close of this speech is very fine. His later and earlier speeches have a freedom and an air of sincerity about them which, in the interval between his Consulship and Cæsar's death, I do not find. During that interval he was mixed up with the aristocratical party, and yet afraid of the Triumvirate. When all the great party-leaders were dead, he found himself at the head of the state, and spoke with a boldness and energy which he had not shown since his youthful days." Macaulay did full justice to Cicero's vigour and eloquence at this grave political conjuncture; but he condemned his course of action, and deeply disapproved his motives. "His whole conduct," he writes, "was as bad as possible. His love of peace, the best part of his public character, was overcome by personal animosity and wounded vanity." At the end of the last Philippic Macaulay compares him with Demosthenes, whom he ranks above him as an orator. "As a man," he writes, "I think of Cicero much as I always did, except that I am more disgusted with his conduct after Cæsar's death. I really think that he met with little more than his deserts from the Triumvirs. It is quite certain, as Livy says, that he suffered nothing more than he would have inflicted. There is

an impatience of peaceful counsels, a shrinking from all plans of conciliation, a thirst for blood, in all the Philippics, which, (whatever he may say,) can be attributed only to personal hatred, and is particularly odious in a timid man."

That Tully met with his deserts at the hands of the Triumvirs is a hard saying; but his actions and his utterances, during the last years of his life, were repugnant, and sometimes even shocking, to Macaulay. Cæsar had shown himself a kind and considerate friend to Cicero, and Cicero had professed gratitude and esteem for Cæsar; but, after Cæsar's murder in the Senate-house, Cicero exulted over his fate in words as sharp and cruel as the dagger of Cassius. Antony, again, had urged Cicero to lay aside ancient enmities, and secure for himself a tranquil and honourable old age as the crown of his splendid career. "I only wish," answered Cicero, "that you had addressed me face to face, instead of by writing; for you might then have perceived not by my words alone, but by my countenance, my eyes, and my forehead, the affection that I bear to you. For,—as I always loved you for the attentions you have shown me, and the services you have done me,—so, in these later days, your public conduct has been such that I hold no one

dearer than you." That was how Cicero wrote *to* Antony; but, before a year was over, he thus wrote *about* Antony to one of Cæsar's assassins: "Would to heaven you had invited me to that noble feast which you made on the Ides of March! No remnants, most assuredly, would have been left behind. * * * I have a grudge even against so good a man as yourself when I reflect that it was through *your* intervention that this pest of humanity is still among the living." "Infamous!" wrote Macaulay. "Compare this with his language about Antony before their quarrel."

None the less did Macaulay regard Cicero as among the foremost men of all the ages. I remember paying him a visit in his rose-garden at Campden Hill, —as pleasant a corner of the earth as any that Marcus Tullius himself possessed at Tusculum, or Antium, or Arpinum. I was in a hurry to communicate to him my discovery of the magnificent verses in which Juvenal bids observe how the world's two mightiest orators were brought by their genius and eloquence to a violent and tragic death. I can almost repeat Macaulay's exact words. "It is," he said, "very fine satire; but there is another aspect of the question. A man cannot expect to win great fame without running great risks and perils. In spite of all that Juvenal

says, Cicero and Demosthenes would never have consented to renounce their place in history in order to be sure of dying quietly in their beds."[1]

Macaulay read Plato in a ponderous folio, sixteen inches long by ten broad, and weighing within half an ounce of twelve pounds;—which was very near the weight of a regulation musket at the period when he himself was Secretary of War. Published by Marsilius Ficinus at Frankfort in the year 1602, it contained nearly fourteen hundred closely printed pages of antique Greek type, bristling with those contractions which are a terror to the luxurious modern scholar. The Latin translation, arranged in parallel columns by the side of the original text, presents an aspect of positively revolting dullness. The blank spaces of this grim volume are lit up by Macaulay's comments, sparkling with vitality and fire, but sometimes softened and awed into a strain of touching beauty. The Timæus, the Parmenides, and others of the more abstruse dialogues, appear to have interested

[1] Macaulay read Latin authors in the Bipontine edition of 1781, and Greek authors in Dindorf's collection. His books contained nothing except the text; for, on whatever language he was engaged, whether ancient or modern, he had a profound aversion to explanatory notes. I cannot tell how much use he had made of a Lexicon. At that period of his life when he read with me the Plutus of Aristophanes, the Midias of Demosthenes, and the Gorgias of Plato, he knew the meaning of every word.

him little; for, greatly as he loved Plato, it was not chiefly for the sake of Plato's metaphysics. But at any pitched battle between Socrates, and a tough opponent, Macaulay assisted in a spirit of joyous exhilaration which people seldom bring to the perusal of a philosophical treatise. The Euthydemus, in particular, is enlivened throughout by his exclamations of amusement and delight. "It seems incredible that these absurdities of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus should have been mistaken for wisdom, even by the weakest of mankind. I can hardly help thinking that Plato has overcharged the portrait. But the humour of the dialogue is admirable." "Glorious irony!" "Incomparably ludicrous!" "No writer, not even Cervantes, was so great a master of this solemn ridicule as Plato." "There is hardly any comedy, in any language, more diverting than this dialogue. It is not only richly homourous. The characters are most happily sustained and discriminated. The contrast between the youthful petulance of Ctesippus, and the sly, sarcastic mock humility of Socrates is admirable." There are personal touches among the annotations on the Euthydemus. To Plato's rather grudging description of the man of the world, who is likewise a man of the study, and who divides his time between

philosophy and politics, Macaulay appends the remark: "Dulcissima hercle, eademque nobilissima vita." And, below the last line of the dialogue, there occurs the following entry: "Calcutta, May 1835. Yesterday the London News of the 2nd of March arrived by steamer from Bombay. Peel beaten in two divisions. Suave mari magno——"

Macaulay read the Republic with the eyes of a Whig and an Englishman; but, whatever he might think of Plato's political and social ideals, he had a deep and abiding admiration for Plato himself. "Plato," Macaulay wrote, "has been censured with great justice for his doctrine about the community of women and the exposure of children. But nobody, as far as I remember, has done justice to him on one important point. No ancient politician appears to have thought so highly of the capacity of women, and to have been inclined to make them so important. He was to blame for wishing to divest them of all their characteristic attractions; but, in return, he proposed to admit them to a full participation in the power and honour enjoyed by men." When the philosopher enjoins the inhabitants of his Utopia to treat a great poet with profound reverence, but to get him outside their community at all hazards,—to anoint his head

with precious unguents, and crown him with garlands, and then pass him on as soon as possible to some neighbouring city,—Macaulay remarks: "You may see that Plato was passionately fond of poetry, even when arguing against it." Where Plato recommends a broader patriotism as a corrective to the fierce and narrow municipal sentiment of the small Greek states, "this passage," he writes, "does Plato great honour. Philhellenism is a step towards philanthropy. There is an enlargement of mind in this work which I do not remember to have found in any earlier composition, and in very few ancient works, either earlier or later." There was, (said Macaulay,) something far beyond the ordinary political philosophy of Greece in that fine definition of the object for which civil government should exist,—"the relief and respite of mankind from misfortune." Of the striking conception of abstract justice, in the Second Book of the Republic, he writes: "This is indeed a noble dream. Pity that it should come through the gate of ivory!" The Eighth Book, in the judgment of the great critic, was above and beyond all detailed criticism. "I remember," he says, "nothing in Greek philosophy superior to this in profundity, ingenuity, and eloquence."

Macaulay rated the Protagoras exceedingly high

as a work of literary art. "A very lively picture," he wrote, "of Athenian manners. There is scarcely anywhere so interesting a view of the interior of a Greek house in the most interesting age of Greece."[1] "Callias seems to have been a munificent and courteous patron of learning. What with sophists, what with pretty women, and what with sycophants, he came to the end of a noble fortune." "Alcibiades is very well represented here. It is plain that he wants only to get up a row among the sophists." "Protagoras seems to deserve the character he gives himself. Nothing can be more courteous and generous than his language. Socrates shows abundance of talent and acuteness in this dialogue; but the more I read of his conversation, the less I wonder at the fierce hatred he provoked. He evidently had an ill-natured pleasure in making men,—particularly men famed for wisdom and eloquence,—look like fools; and it would not be difficult, even for a person of far inferior powers to his, to draw the ablest speculator into contradictions upon questions as subtle as those which he loved to investigate. Protagoras seems to have been a man of great eloquence and accomplishments, though no

[1] When the porter slammed the door in the face of Socrates, with the observation that his master was busy, "A more sincere, and a less civil, answer," said Macaulay, "than our 'Not at home.'"

match for Socrates at Socrates's own weapons. It is plain from many passages that this dialogue, if it be not altogether a fiction, took place about thirty years before the death of Socrates. Pericles seems to have been still living. Alcibiades was hardly arrived at manhood. I should think, from one or two expressions, that the Peloponnesian war had not yet begun. I can hardly suppose this, and the other dialogues in which Socrates is introduced, to be purely fictitious. Some such conversation took place, I imagine. Socrates had often related in Plato's hearing what had passed; and this most beautiful drama, for such it is, was formed out of those materials."

At the commencement of the Gorgias is written: "This was my favourite dialogue at College. I do not know whether I shall like it as well now. May 1, 1837." Macaulay followed the cut-and-thrust of the controversy with brisk attention. "Polus is much in the right. Socrates abused scandalously the advantages which his wonderful talents, and his command of temper, gave him." "You have made a blunder, and Socrates will have you in an instant." "Hem! Retiarium astutum!" "There you are in the Sophist's net. I think that, if I had been in the place of Polus, Socrates would hardly have had so easy a

job of it." When Callicles, the unscrupulous and dexterous votary of politics and pleasure, took up the foil, the exchanges came quick and sharp. "What a command of his temper the old fellow had, and what terrible, though delicate, ridicule! A bitter fellow too, with all his suavity." "This is not pure morality; but there is a good deal of weight in what Callicles says. He is wrong in not perceiving that the real happiness, not only of the weak many, but of the able few, is promoted by virtue. The character of Callicles throws great light on that fine diagnostic of Thucydides on the state of political morality in Greece during the contest between the oligarchical and democratic principles. When I read this dialogue as a lad at college, I thought Callicles the most wicked wretch that ever lived; and when, about the time of my leaving college, I wrote a trifling piece for Knight's Magazine, in which some Athenian characters were introduced, I made this Callicles the villain of the drama.[1] I now see that he was merely a fair specimen of the public men of Athens in that age. Although his principles were those of aspiring and voluptuous men in unquiet times, his feelings seem to have been friendly and

[1] Scenes from "The Athenian Revels," January 1824. The little drama, together with its sister piece, "The Fragments of a Roman Tale," may be found in the Miscellaneous Writings.

kind." His warning to Socrates, (added Macaulay,) about the perils which, in a city like Athens, beset a man who neglected politics, and devoted himself exclusively to philosophical speculation, was well meant, and, as the event proved, only too well founded.

Macaulay unreservedly admired the glorious rhapsody which ends the dialogue. "This," he wrote, "is one of the finest passages in Greek literature. Plato is a real poet." "These doctrines of yours," (said Socrates to Gorgias and Callicles,) "have now been examined and found wanting; and this doctrine alone has stood the test,—that we ought to be more afraid of wronging than of being wronged, and that the prime business of every man is, not to seem good, but to be good, in all his private and public dealings." That sentence was marked by Macaulay with three pencil-lines of assent and admiration. "This just and noble conclusion," he writes, "atones for much fallacy in the reasoning by which Socrates arrived at it. The Gorgias is certainly a very fine work. It is deformed by a prodigious quantity of sophistry. But the characters are so happily supported, the conversations so animated and natural, the close so eloquent, and the doctrines inculcated, though over-strained, are so lofty and pure, that it is impossible not to consider it

as one of the greatest performances which have descended to us from that wonderful generation."

When Socrates was put upon his trial, he reminded the Court, in the course of his celebrated defence, how he had braved the popular fury by refusing to concur in the judicial murder of the Ten Generals; and how, at the peril of his life, he had silently disobeyed the unjust behests of the Thirty Tyrants. Macaulay pronounced that portion of the speech to be as interesting and striking a passage as he ever heard or read. When Socrates expressed a serene conviction that to die was gain, even if death were nothing more than an untroubled and dreamless sleep, "Milton," said Macaulay, "thought otherwise.

> 'Sad cure! For who would lose
> Though full of pain, this intellectual being;
> These thoughts that wander through eternity?'

I once thought with Milton; but every day brings me nearer and nearer to the doctrine here laid down by Socrates." "And now," said the condemned criminal to his judges, "the time has come when we must part, and go our respective ways,—I to die, you to live; and which of us has the happier fortune in store for him is known to none, except to God." "A most

solemn and noble close!" said Macaulay. "Nothing was ever written, or spoken, approaching in sober sublimity to the latter part of the Apology. It is impossible to read it without feeling one's mind elevated and strengthened."

Phædo relates how Socrates, on the last morning of his life, amused himself by recalling his own youthful interest in the problems of natural science. "This," said Macaulay, "is what Aristophanes charged Socrates with, and what Xenophon most stoutly denied. The truth seems to be that the mind of that wonderful man, as he grew older, gradually turned itself away from physical speculations, and addicted itself more and more to moral philosophy. Aristophanes knew this probably before Xenophon was born." Macaulay thus remarks on the beautiful legend about the purification of souls in Acheron and Cocytus, with which Socrates concluded his final talk on earth: "All this is merely a fine poem, like Dante's. Milton has borrowed largely from it; and, considered as an effort of the imagination, it is one from which no poet need be ashamed to borrow." When the master drank the poison, and when Apollodorus burst into a passion of weeping, and broke down in a moment the composure of the whole company of disciples, Macaulay says,

"This is the passage, I dare say, which Cicero could never read without tears. I never could. Phædo tells a noble and most touching story. Addison meant to have written a tragedy on it. He would infallibly have spoiled it. The reasonings of Socrates, on his last day, convey no satisfaction to my mind; but the example of benevolence, patience, and self-possession, which he exhibited, is incomparable and inestimable." And again, on the last page of the Crito, he writes: "There is much that may be questioned in the reasoning of Socrates; but it is impossible not to admire the wisdom and virtue which it indicates. When we consider the moral state of Greece in his time, and the revolution which he produced in men's notions of good and evil, we must pronounce him one of the greatest men that ever lived."

THE END

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