FAMOUS ENGLISH ESSAYS

英文名人論說

Famous English Series—Number Three

FAMOUS ENGLISH ESSAYS

SELECTED AND ANNOTATED BY

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Good books like good friends are few and chosen,
the more select the more enjoyable.—Alcott

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SHANGHAI

PREFACE

This book may be used in the classroom for two purposes: first, as a text-book of English literature; and, secondly, as a selection of model essays for composition work. For the private student it constitutes a handy volume of delightful reading matter.

The essays are selected with especial reference to their suitability for Chinese readers. The limited space at my disposal has restricted my choice of material to the most eminent English and American writers of the nineteenth century. No living author, however, is included; for celebrated though he may be, posterity alone is competent to pass judgment upon his works and to assign him a place in the commonwealth of letters.

The selections are arranged in order of difficulty. They are furnished with copious notes so as to help the student to a proper understanding of the text. To show in outline the structure of Macaulay's essay on the *Life of Johnson*, the longest essay in this compilation, a "Topical Analysis" is inserted in front of it. This will be found especially helpful to the student of composition.

The present volume does not pretend to be a substitute for larger works of the same kind. Rather is it intended merely as an introduction to a more extensive and systematic study of English literature. In the words of Sir Philip Sidney: "He doth, as if your journey should lye through a fair vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of Grapes; that, full of that taste, you may long to passe further."

A word by way of acknowledgment. For the annotations of Macaulay's essay I have laid under contribution Mr. A. W. Walker's and Professor William P. Trent's excellent editions of the same work.

C. H. W.

SHANGHAI, August 19, 1915.

TOPICAL ANALYSIS OF MACAULAY'S "LIFE OF JOHNSON"

[*The figures in parenthesis refer to paragraphs*]

JOHNSON'S EARLY DAYS (1-8)

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FAMOUS ENGLISH ESSAYS

SAMUEL JOHNSON[1]

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY[2]

[*The paragraph numbers do not appear in the original: they are inserted here to facilitate reference to the "Topical Analysis."*]

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,[3] and a bookseller of great note in the midland counties.[4] 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,

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[1] Written in December, 1856, and first appeared in the eighth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica.*

[2] (1800-1859): English historian, essayist, poet, and statesman. His most important works are his *Essays*, *History of England*, and *The Lays of Ancient Rome.*

[3] A city in middle England, about one hundred miles to the north of London.

[4] That is, the central counties of England; namely, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Rutlandshire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Bedfordshire, and Buckinghamshire.

that the country rectors[1] 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[2] to the sovereigns in possession, was to the last a Jacobite[3] 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,[4] 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

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1 Country rectors were often very ignorant in those days.

2 The Revolution of 1688 drove James II to France and placed his son-in-law, William of Orange, on the throne of England. As William was childless, it was provided that the crown should pass to Anne, second daughter of James II, and, in default of direct heirs, to his cousin Sophia, who had married the prince of Hanover. With the object of stamping out the influence of James II, laws were passed requiring all government officials to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy.

3 Adherents of James (Latin=*Jacobus*) II and his son.

4 That is, of mental endowments.

to remove. His parents were weak enough to believe that the royal touch[1] 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.[2] 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

1 From the time of Edward the Confessor, people believed that the Sovereign's touch would cure scrofula.

2 Reigned from 1702–1714.

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[1] 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[2] delicacy of taste which is the boast of the great public schools[3] 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[4] at Eton. He was peculiarly attracted by the works of the great restorers of learning.[5] Once, while searching for some apples, he found a huge folio volume of Petrarch's[6] works.

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1 Athens, the principal city of ancient Greece, was situated in Attica. Hence *Attic* is used as equivalent to *Athenian*.

2 The Augustan Age (31 B.C.-14 A.D.) was the period in which Roman literature reached its highest state of purity and refinement. The term *Augustan Age* has been applied in English literature to the reign of Elizabeth, and more often to that of Anne.

3 For example, Eton, Rugby, Harrow, and Westminster, which are not "public" in the ordinary sense of the term, but are maintained by endowments and the fees of pupils.

4 Sixth class, the highest class at Eton.

5 That is, the leaders of the great revival of classical art and letters in Europe during the fifteenth century, commonly known as the Renaissance. The most important of them are Petrarch, Boccaccio, Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, and Colet.

6 (1304-1374): a great Italian poet, and the "father of the revival of learning."

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,[1] 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.[2] When the young scholar presented himself to the rulers of that society,[3] 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

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1 Oxford or Cambridge.

2 The Oxford and Cambridge Universities consist of a number of Colleges, each of which constitutes an independent, self-governing corporation.

3 An English college is an incorporated association of students. Its rulers are the *master* (or *warden*) and the *fellows*.

first day of his residence, he surprised his teachers by quoting Macrobius;[1] 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[2] of Christ Church[3] 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,[4] 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

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1 An obscure Latin writer who died in 415 A.D. His best known work is a commentary on *Scipio's Dream* of Cicero.

2 The square or court in an English college is called the *quadrangle*.

3 The largest and most patrician college in Oxford. It was founded by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525.

4 One paying all college expenses, including that of the "commons" (i.e. common eating-table) is known as a "commoner." In Johnson's time the higher class of commoners received the title of *gentleman commoner*.

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"[1] into Latin verse. The style and rhythm, indeed, were not exactly Virgilian;[2] 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.

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[1] Pope, Alexander (1688-1744): a famous English poet and the literary dictator of his age. His *Messiah*, a religious pastoral in imitation of the fourth Eclogue of Virgil's *Pollio*, first appeared in *The Spectator* for May 14, 1712.

[2] That is, resembling the style of Virgil (70-19 B.C.), the greatest Latin poet.

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.[1] 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.[2] 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.[3] 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

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[1] A person affected with hypochondria, "a mental disorder characterized by morbid anxiety as to the patient's health, often associated with simulation of diseases and frequently developing into melancholia." *(Webster)*

[2] According to English law an insane person is free from criminal liability, and a will made by a person of unsound mind can be nullified in an action brought by one of the interested parties.

[3] The prayer which Christ taught his disciples. See *Matthew* vi, 9-13.

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 of 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,[1] a gay officer of noble family, who happened to be quartered there. Gilbert Walmesley,[2] registrar of the ecclesiastical court of the diocese,—a man of distinguished parts, learning, and knowledge of the world,—did himself honour by patronizing 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[3] in Leicestershire; he resided as a humble companion in the house of a country gentleman[4]; but a life of dependence was insupportable to his haughty spirit. He repaired to Birmingham,[5] and there earned a few guineas by literary drudgery. In that town he printed

1 Born in 1700; son of the Earl of Bristol and brother of Lord John Hervey.

2 (1680-1751): an English lawyer of considerable attainments. At the end of his *Life* of Edmund Smith (see *Lives of the Poets*), Johnson paid a tribute to this friend.

3 That is, assistant master in a school in which Greek and Latin grammar formed a principal part of the curriculum. The word *usher* is now rarely used in this sense.

4 Sir Wolstan Dixie, patron of the school.

5 A town of middle England.