

THE  
LIFE AND LETTERS  
OF  
LORD MACAULAY

BY HIS NEPHEW  
THE RIGHT HON.  
SIR GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN, BART.

Popular Edition

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# PREFACE

TO

## THE SECOND EDITION.

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WHEN publishing the Second Edition of Lord MACAULAY'S Life and Letters, I may be permitted to say that no pains were spared in order that the First Edition should be as complete as possible. But, in the course of the last nine months, I have come into possession of a certain quantity of supplementary matter, which the appearance of the book has elicited from various quarters. Stray letters have been hunted up. Half-forgotten anecdotes have been recalled. Floating reminiscences have been reduced to shape ;—in one case, as will be seen from the extracts from Sir William Stirling Maxwell's letter, by no unskilful hand. I should have been tempted to draw more largely upon these new resources, if it had not been for the examples, which literary history only too copiously affords, of the risk that attends any attempt to alter the form, or considerably increase the bulk, of a work which, in its original shape, has had the good fortune not to displease the public. I have, however, ventured, by a very sparing selection from sufficiently abundant material, slightly to enlarge, and, I trust, somewhat to enrich the book.

If this Second Edition is not rigidly correct in word and substance, I have no valid excuse to offer. Nothing more pleasantly indicates the wide-spread interest with which Lord

MACAULAY has inspired his readers, both at home and in foreign countries, than the almost microscopic care with which these volumes have been studied. It is not too much to say that, in several instances, a misprint, or a verbal error, has been brought to my notice by at least five-and-twenty different persons; and there is hardly a page in the book which has not afforded occasion for comment or suggestion from some friendly correspondent. There is no statement of any importance throughout the two volumes the accuracy of which has been circumstantially impugned; but some expressions, which have given personal pain or annoyance, have been softened or removed.

There is another class of criticism to which I have found myself altogether unable to defer. I have frequently been told by reviewers that I should "have better consulted MACAULAY's reputation," or "done more honour to MACAULAY's memory," if I had omitted passages in the letters or diaries which may be said to bear the trace of intellectual narrowness, or political and religious intolerance. I cannot but think that strictures of this nature imply a serious misconception of the biographer's duty. It was my business to show my Uncle as he was, and not as I, or any one else, would have had him. If a faithful picture of MACAULAY could not have been produced without injury to his memory, I should have left the task of drawing that picture to others; but, having once undertaken the work, I had no choice but to ask myself, with regard to each feature of the portrait, not whether it was attractive, but whether it was characteristic. We who had the best opportunity of knowing him have always been convinced that his character would stand the test of an exact, and even a minute, delineation; and we humbly believe that our confidence was not misplaced, and that the reading world has now extended to the man the approbation which it has long conceded to his books.

G. O. T.

*December 1876.*

# PREFACE

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

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THIS work has been undertaken principally from a conviction that it is the performance of a duty which, to the best of my ability, it is incumbent on me to fulfil. Though even on this ground I cannot appeal to the forbearance of my readers, I may venture to refer to a peculiar difficulty which I have experienced in dealing with Lord MACAULAY's private papers.

To give to the world compositions not intended for publication may be no injury to the fame of writers who, by habit, were careless and hasty workmen; but it is far otherwise in the case of one who made it a rule for himself to publish nothing which was not carefully planned, strenuously laboured, and minutely finished. Now, it is impossible to examine Lord MACAULAY's journals and correspondence without being persuaded that the idea of their being printed, even in part, never was present to his mind; and I should not feel myself justified in laying them before the public if it were not that their unlaboured and spontaneous character adds to their biographical value all, and perhaps more than all, that it detracts from their literary merit.

To the heirs and relations of Mr. Thomas Flower Ellis and Mr. Adam Black, to the Marquis of Lansdowne, to Mr. Macvey Napier, and to the executors of Dr. Whewell, my thanks are

due for the courtesy with which they have placed the different portions of my Uncle's correspondence at my disposal. Lady Caroline Lascelles has most kindly permitted me to use as much of Lord Carlisle's journal as relates to the subject of this work; and Mr. Charles Cowan, my Uncle's old opponent at Edinburgh, has sent me a considerable mass of printed matter bearing upon the elections of 1847 and 1852. The late Sir Edward Ryan, and Mr. Fitzjames Stephen, spared no pains to inform me with regard to Lord MACAULAY's work at Calcutta. His early letters, with much that relates to the whole course of his life, have been preserved, studied, and arranged, by the affectionate industry of his sister, Miss Macaulay; and material of high interest has been entrusted to my hands by Mr. and the Hon. Mrs. Edward Cropper. I have been assisted throughout the book by the sympathy, and the recollections, of my sister, Lady Holland, the niece to whose custody Lord MACAULAY's papers by inheritance descend.

G. O. T.

March 1876.

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# LIFE AND LETTERS OF LORD MACAULAY.

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1800-1818.

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HE who undertakes to publish the memoirs of a distinguished man may find a ready apology in the custom of the age. If we measure the effective demand for biography by the supply, the person commemorated need possess but a very moderate reputation, and have played no exceptional part, in order to carry the reader through many hundred pages of anecdote, dissertation, and correspondence. To judge from the advertisements of our circulating libraries, the public curiosity is keen with regard to some who did nothing worthy of special note, and others who acted so continuously in the face of the world that, when their course was run, there was little left for the world to learn about them. It may, therefore, be taken for granted that a desire exists to hear something authentic about the life of a man who has produced works which are universally known, but which bear little or no indication of the private history and the personal qualities of the author.

This was in a marked degree the case with Lord Macaulay. His two famous contemporaries in English literature have, consciously or unconsciously, told their own story in their books. Those who could see between the lines in "*David Copperfield*" were aware that they had before them a delightful autobiography; and all who knew how to read Thackeray could trace him in his novels through every stage in his course, on from the day when as a little boy, consigned to the care of English relatives and schoolmasters, he left his mother on the steps of the landing-place at Calcutta. The dates and names were wanting, but the man was there; while the most ardent admirers of Macaulay will admit that a minute study of his literary productions left them, as far as any but an intellectual knowledge of the writer himself was concerned, very much as it found them. A consummate master of his craft, he turned out works which bore the unmistakeable marks of the artificer's hand, but which did not reflect his features. It would be almost as hard to compose a picture of the author from the *History*, the *Essays*, and the *Lays*, as to evolve an idea of Shakespeare from *Henry the Fifth* and *Measure for Measure*.

But, besides being a man of letters, Lord Macaulay was a statesman, a jurist, and a brilliant ornament of society, at a time when to shine in society was a distinction which a man of eminence and ability might justly value. In these several capacities, it will be said, he was known well, and known widely. But in the first place, as these pages will show, there was one side of his life (to him, at any rate, the most important,) of which even the persons with whom he mixed most freely and confidentially in London drawing-rooms, in the Indian Council chamber, and in the lobbies and on the benches of the House of Commons, were only in part aware. And in the next place, those who have seen his features and heard his voice are few already and become yearly fewer; while, by a rare fate in literary annals, the number of those who read his books is still rapidly increasing. For everyone who sat with him in private company or at the transaction of public business,—for every ten who have listened to his oratory in Parliament or from the hustings,—there must be tens of thousands whose interest in history and literature he has awakened and informed by his pen, and who would gladly know what manner of man it was that has done them so great a service.

To gratify that most legitimate wish is the duty of those who have the means at their command. His lifelike image is indelibly impressed upon their minds, (for how could it be otherwise with any who had enjoyed so close relations with

such a man?) although the skill which can reproduce that image before the general eye may well be wanting. But his own letters will supply the deficiencies of the biographer. Never did any one leave behind him more copious materials for enabling others to put together a narrative which might be the history, not indeed of his times, but of the man himself. For in the first place he so soon showed promise of being one who would give those among whom his early years were passed reason to be proud, and still more certain assurance that he would never afford them cause for shame, that what he wrote was preserved with a care very seldom bestowed on childish compositions; and the value set upon his letters by those with whom he corresponded naturally enough increased as years went on. And in the next place he was by nature so incapable of affectation or concealment that he could not write otherwise than as he felt, and, to one person at least, could never refrain from writing all that he felt; so that we may read in his letters, as in a clear mirror, his opinions and inclinations, his hopes and affections, at every succeeding period of his existence. Such letters could never have been submitted to an editor not connected with both correspondents by the strongest ties; and even one who stands in that position must often be sorely puzzled as to what he has the heart to publish and the right to withhold.

I am conscious that a near relative has peculiar temptations towards that partiality of the biographer which Lord Macaulay himself so often and so cordially denounced; and the danger is greater in the case of one whose knowledge of him coincided with his later years; for it would not be easy to find a nature which gained more by time than his, and lost less. But believing, as I do, (to use his own words,) that "if he were now living he would have sufficient judgment and sufficient greatness of mind" to wish to be shown as himself, I will suppress no trait in his disposition, or incident in his career, which might provoke blame or question. Such in all points as he was, the world, which has been so indulgent to him, has a right to know him: and those who best love him do not fear the consequences of freely submitting his character and his actions to the public verdict.

The most devout believers in the doctrine of the transmission of family qualities will be content with tracing back descent through four generations; and all favourable hereditary influences, both intellectual and moral, are assured by a genealogy which derives from a Scotch Manse. In the first decade of the eighteenth century Aulay Macaulay, the great-grandfather of

the historian, was minister of Tiree and Coll; where he was "grievously annoyed by a decret obtained after instance of the Laird of Ardchattan, taking away his stipend." The Duchess of Argyll of the day appears to have done her best to see him righted; "but his health being much impaired, and there being no church or meeting-house, he was exposed to the violence of the weather at all seasons; and having no manse or glebe, and no fund for communion elements, and no mortification for schools or any pious purpose in either of the islands, and the air being unwholesome, he was dissatisfied;" and so, to the great regret of the parishioners whom he was leaving behind, he migrated to Harris, where he discharged the clerical duties for nearly half a century.

Aulay was the father of fourteen children, of whom one, Kenneth, the minister of Ardnamurchan, still occupies a very humble niche in the temple of literature. He wrote a History of St. Kilda which happened to fall into the hands of Dr. Johnson, who spoke of it more than once with favour. His reason for liking the book is characteristic enough. Mr. Macaulay had recorded the belief prevalent in St. Kilda that, as soon as the factor landed on the island, all the inhabitants had an attack which from the account appears to have partaken of the nature both of influenza and bronchitis. This touched the superstitious vein in Johnson, who praised him for his "magnanimity" in venturing to chronicle so questionable a phenomenon: the more so because,—said the Doctor,—“Macaulay set out with a prejudice against prejudice, and wanted to be a smart modern thinker.” To a reader of our day the History of St. Kilda appears to be innocent of any trace of such pretension: unless it be that the author speaks slightly of second-sight, a subject for which Johnson always had a strong hankering. In 1773 Johnson paid a visit to Mr. Macaulay, who by that time had removed to Calder, and began the interview by congratulating him on having produced “a very pretty piece of topography,”—a compliment which did not seem to the taste of the author. The conversation turned upon rather delicate subjects, and, before many hours had passed, the guest had said to the host one of the very rudest things recorded by Boswell. Later on in the same evening he atoned for his incivility by giving one of the boys of the house a pocket Sallust, and promising to procure him a servitorship at Oxford. Subsequently Johnson pronounced that Mr. Macaulay was not competent to have written the book that went by his name; a decision which, to those who happen to have read the work, will give a very poor notion of my ancestor’s abilities.



The eldest son of old Aulay, and the grandfather of Lord Macaulay, was John, born in the year 1720. He was minister successively of Barra, South Uist, Lismore, and Inverary;—the last appointment being a proof of the interest which the family of Argyll continued to take in the fortunes of the Macaulays. He, likewise, during the famous tour in the Hebrides, came across the path of Boswell, who mentions him in an exquisitely absurd paragraph, the first of those in which is described the visit to Inverary Castle.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Macaulay afterwards passed the evening with the travellers at their inn, and provoked Johnson into what Boswell calls warmth, and anyone else would call brutality, by the very proper remark that he had no notion of people being in earnest in good professions if their practice belied them. When we think what well-known ground this was to Lord Macaulay, it is impossible to suppress a wish that the great talker had been at hand to avenge his grandfather and grand-uncle. Next morning “Mr. Macaulay breakfasted with us, nothing hurt or dismayed by his last night’s correction. Being a man of good sense he had a just admiration of Dr. Johnson.” He was rewarded by seeing Johnson at his very best, and hearing him declaim some of the finest lines that ever were written in a manner worthy of his subject.

There is a tradition that, in his younger days, the minister of Inverary proved his Whiggism by giving information to the authorities which almost led to the capture of the young Pretender. It is perhaps a matter of congratulation that this item was not added to the heavy account that the Stuarts have against the Macaulay family. John Macaulay enjoyed a high reputation as a preacher, and was especially renowned for his fluency. In 1774 he removed to Cardross in Dumbartonshire, where, on the bank of the noble estuary of the Clyde, he spent the last fifteen years of a useful and honoured life. He was twice married. His first wife died at the birth of his first child. Eight years afterwards, in 1757, he espoused Margaret, daughter of Colin Campbell of Inveresragan, who survived him by a single year. By her he had the patriarchal number of twelve children, whom he brought up on the old Scotch

<sup>1</sup> “Monday, Oct. 25.—My acquaintance, the Rev. Mr. John M’Aulay, one of the ministers of Inverary, and brother to our good friend at Calder, came to us this morning, and accompanied us to the castle, where I presented Dr. Johnson to the Duke of Argyll. We were shown through the house; and I never shall forget the impression made upon my fancy by some of the ladies’ maids tripping about in neat morning dresses. After seeing for a long time little but rusticity, their lively manner, and gay inviting appearance, pleased me so much, that I thought for a moment I could have been a knight-errant for them.”



system,—common to the households of minister, man of business, farmer, and peasant alike,—on fine air, simple diet, and a solid training in knowledge human and divine. Two generations after, Mr. Carlyle, during a visit to the late Lord Ashburton at the Grange, caught sight of Macaulay's face in unwonted repose, as he was turning over the pages of a book. "I noticed," said he, "the homely Norse features that you find everywhere in the Western Isles, and I thought to myself: 'Well! Anyone can see that you are an honest good sort of fellow, made out of oatmeal.'"

Several of John Macaulay's children obtained position in the world. Aulay, the eldest by his second wife, became a clergyman of the Church of England. His reputation as a scholar and antiquary stood high, and in the capacity of a private tutor he became known even in royal circles. He published pamphlets and treatises, the list of which it is not worth while to record, and meditated several large works that perhaps never got much beyond a title. Of all his undertakings the one best deserving commemoration in these pages was a tour that he made into Scotland in company with Mr. Thomas Babington, the owner of Rothley Temple in Leicestershire, in the course of which the travellers paid a visit to the manse at Cardross. Mr. Babington fell in love with one of the daughters of the house, Miss Jean Macaulay, and married her in 1787. Nine years afterwards he had an opportunity of presenting his brother-in-law Aulay Macaulay with the very pleasant living of Rothley.

Alexander, another son of John Macaulay, succeeded his father as minister of Cardross. Colin went into the Indian army, and died a general. He followed the example of the more ambitious among his brother officers, and exchanged military for civil duties. In 1799 he acted as secretary to a political and diplomatic Commission which accompanied the force that marched under General Harris against Seringapatam. The leading Commissioner was Colonel Wellesley, and to the end of General Macaulay's life the great Duke corresponded with him on terms of intimacy, and (so the family flattered themselves) even of friendship. Soon after the commencement of the century Colin Macaulay was appointed Resident at the important native state of Travancore. While on this employment he happened to light upon a valuable collection of books, and rapidly made himself master of the principal European languages, which he spoke and wrote with a facility surprising in one who had acquired them within a few leagues of Cape Comorin.