

A STUDY OF THE CONTEMPORARY
CRITICISMS OF MACMULLEN'S
HISTORY OF ENGLAND
(1840 - 1865)

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of
English and the Graduate Council of the Kansas State
Teachers College of Emporia in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

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August, 1965

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PREFACE

This study is intended to determine the purpose for the writing of the History of England by Thomas Babington Macaulay and to determine how contemporary critics accepted the work. For assistance and consideration in accomplishing this task, the writer would like to express appreciation to Dr. Charles Walton and Dr. June Morgan. Also appreciation is due the libraries at Wichita State University and the University of Kansas.

August, 1965
Wichita, Kansas

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CHAPTER I

MACAULAY'S EARLY PREPARATION FOR WRITING OF HISTORY OF ENGLAND

"I shall not be satisfied unless I produce something which shall for a few days supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies."¹ With this statement, Thomas Babington Macaulay assigned himself to an almost superhuman task which was to absorb most of his life in one way or another. This task, the writing of a history of England, never left his thoughts, and most of his traveling, reading, living became directed toward its successful completion.

Thomas Babington Macaulay learned to read at the age of three, but his manner of reading and his selection of subjects for reading set him apart from individuals several times his age.² While others read by word and phrase, Macaulay read by paragraph and page, recording in his memory for future reference everything that he read.³ This phenomenal memory later served him well when he

¹G. Otto Trevelyan, Life and Letters, II, 96.

²Wilbur C. Abbott, Adventures in Reputation, p. 6.

³Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville, "Lord Macaulay," The Pocket University, III, 116.

undertook the writing of his history of England. Macaulay's memory was almost superhuman, permitting him to digest and arrange, as well as retain, within his mind all that he had read.⁴ Smith, a contemporary, called him "a book in breeches."⁵ His exceptionally retentive memory enabled him to memorize much of his reading; early in life he could repeat all of Demosthenes from memory, great parts of the Old and New Testaments in both Greek and English, and all of the works of Milton.⁶ In fact, Macaulay once stated that should all copies of Paradise Lost and Pilgrim's Progress ever be lost to mankind through some freak happening, he could reconstruct them once again from memory.⁷ However, the fact that he could recite from a particular work was no proof of the merit of the work. For example, his memorization of many contemporary novels was actually a waste of time.⁸ His avid reading of novels did, however, greatly influence his writing of history, because the narrative drama of the novel was to become the drama of his history.

⁴Ibid., III, 117.

⁵Ibid., III, 120.

⁶Ibid., III, 117.

⁷John W. Cunliffe, Leaders of Victorian Revolution, p. 35.

⁸James Augustus Cotter Morison, Macaulay, p. 25.

Macaulay's memory enabled him early to become a dominant figure in every gathering. It was not unusual for him to speak almost uninterruptedly for six hours at a time, holding his listeners completely spellbound with the vividness of his accounts.⁹ Children and adults, educated and uneducated, were impressed by his speech; this competence he was later able to incorporate into his history. After an evening spent in Macaulay's presence, Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville was moved to comment on the ". . . genius, eloquence, astonishing knowledge, and diversified talents . . ." ¹⁰ of his friend, Macaulay; though Lord Carlyle recorded in his journal that "The greatest marvel about him is the quality of trash he remembers."¹¹ The necessity of having to sift through this mental record and evaluate the items accurately became a problem which Macaulay did not overcome very successfully in his writing of history as will be seen in this study.

Because of his father's desires, Macaulay was trained for the bar, but he never actually became a practicing lawyer.¹² The reading of law, however, did permit

⁹Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 176.

¹⁰Greville, op. cit., III, 114.

¹¹Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 173.

¹²Morison, op. cit., p. 18.

him to be quite successful as a politician; and in his role as a member of the House of Commons, he became an accomplished speaker and helped to formulate the opinions of those about him.¹³ His greatest political coup was the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832, for which he diligently campaigned.¹⁴ His constituents praised his competence as a speaker and noted that never had a first-time House speaker commanded so rapt an audience.¹⁵ Soon, whenever it became known that Macaulay would address the House, all members made a concerted effort to be present. It was in Parliament that Macaulay's Victorian Whig attitudes gradually were to be more firmly developed. In chameleon-like form, Macaulay absorbed the thoughts and changed to the attitudes of those about him. In his words, he began to ". . . like what others about me like, and to disapprove what they disapprove."¹⁶ He saw these Whig party men as the real "taste-setters"¹⁷ of England, an attitude which he further pursued and expanded in the history.

¹³ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁴ Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁵ Morison, op. cit., p. 20

¹⁶ Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 164.

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

His writings, furthermore, were becoming very influential on public opinion. At this time, he was supplying much of the copy for The Edinburgh Review, a literary publication by Macvey Napier.¹⁸ The success of this magazine depended upon the amount of copy which was supplied by Macaulay each month, and it was about this time that Macaulay decided to write regularly in order to live like a gentleman.¹⁹ The effect of his essay on John Bunyan is proof of his control over popular opinion, after publication of Macaulay's essay many people who had never before read Bunyan's work began to read and take note of Pilgrim's Progress.²⁰

Money difficulties plagued Macaulay as a young man, and he took on an assignment to India for the government as a solution to these problems.²¹ He further decided that the time spent in travel and in India would not be wasted or taken from his reading. Thus, he outlined for himself a very strenuous reading assignment, much of which was designed to further his knowledge of history, since by this

¹⁸Ibid., I, 123.

¹⁹Ibid., I, 289.

²⁰Ibid., I, 177.

²¹Morison, op. cit., p. 24.

time he was toying with the idea of writing his history of England, although the form and extent of the work were still undecided.²² Many of the authors whom he read on this trip later influenced his thinking about English history and suggested to him ideas concerning the writing of history. Macaulay asked his friend, Maovey Napier, editor of The Edinburgh Review, to supply him with any books of merit which might be published during his sojourn in India, particularly books on English history.²³ An agreement was worked out by which these books would serve as Macaulay's pay for articles which he, in turn, would write and send to The Edinburgh Review while he was in India.²⁴ He felt keenly that a young man, so far from England as he, would be soon forgotten by his fellow countrymen, and he saw this routine writing arrangement as a means of remaining in the thoughts of his acquaintances.

While enroute to India, Macaulay, not his usual talkative self, confined himself to reading. His self-imposed task was stupendous. He kept a detailed list of his reading covering a period, beginning in December of 1834,

²²Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 314-315.

²³Ibid., I, 316.

²⁴Ibid., I, 310-311.

and ending in December of 1835, which serves as an example of the type and of the amount of reading which Macaulay was accomplishing. It included:

. . . Aeschylus twice; Sophocles twice; Euripides once; Pindar twice; Callimachus; Apollonius Phodius; Quintus Calaber; Theocritus twice; Herodotus; Thucydides; almost all Xenophon's works; almost all Plato; Aristotle's "Politics," and a good deal of his "Organon," besides dipping elsewhere in him; the whole of Plutarch's "Lives"; about half of Lucian; two or three books of Athenaeus; Plautus twice; Terrence twice; Lucretius twice; Catullus; Tibullus; Propertius; Lucan; Statius; Silius Italicus; Livy; Velleius Patereulus; Sallust; Caesar; and lastly, Cicero.²⁵

At the time, he also noted that he was presently reading Aristophanes and Lucian.²⁶ This was only a partial list of materials intended to provide the background Macaulay was seeking for his writing of history. It is obvious, as well, that these books were not skimmed or lightly read, for each volume contains his pencil notations of every kind, literary, historical and grammatical.²⁷ Nor did he need translations; he read in Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, French.²⁸ German works he reserved for the trip home, for which he outlined a course of study in this language which he intended to

²⁵Ibid., I, 389.

²⁶loc. cit.

²⁷Ibid., I, 390.

²⁸Ibid., I, 321.

master and did master.²⁹ Although he conceded German to be a difficult language, he could not admit that there was a language he could not " . . . master in four months by working ten hours a day."³⁰ The preceding is but a partial list of the reading which Macaulay accomplished in India, but it includes enough to suggest well the scope of his reading.

Many of the books, however, seem to have had a bearing on his thinking upon history. His marginal notations, journal entries, personal letters, and published essays contained his attitudes toward early historians. He apparently thought of Herodotus as "the father of history."³¹ In his journal entry for November 20, 1848, he wrote that Herodotus was an admirable artist in many respects but that his arrangement was faulty.³² Actually, one learns that it was the child-like quality of story-telling in Herodotus's work that delighted him.³³ However, Macaulay wrote that Herodotus's works made it difficult to distinguish fact from

²⁹Ibid., I, 397.

³⁰Ibid., I, 403-4.

³¹Thomas Babington Macaulay, Macaulay's Works, XI, 184.

³²Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 214.

³³Macaulay, op. cit., XI, 183.

fiction, a failing against which every historian must guard.³⁴ The work of Thucydides was also greatly admired by Macaulay, and one text contained a marginal note indicating that Macaulay thought him the greatest historian who had ever lived.³⁵ Macaulay's evaluation of Thucydides contained a statement of the arrangement which he, Macaulay, found to be very poor; i.e., for the best emphasis, a long narrative story should not be told in chronological order.³⁶ In addition, Macaulay considered Thucydides's observations to be superficial.³⁷ He did, however, judge Thucydides's works to be those of a statesman and scholar, thus elevating history in a refreshing manner when compared to the efforts of Herodotus.³⁸

In his essay, "History," Macaulay likens Xenophon to Herodotus and Thucydides in style, but states that Xenophon was so intent upon giving readers a moral that he failed to give them men and women.³⁹ Xenophon, Macaulay found to be

³⁴Loc. cit.

³⁵Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 409.

³⁶Ibid., II, 215.

³⁷Macaulay, op. cit., XI, 196.

³⁸Ibid., XI, 197.

³⁹Loc. cit.

In a marginal note of his copy of Sallust, Macaulay wrote that while Sallust was inferior to Livy and Tacitus, he, nevertheless, produced good, interesting work.⁴⁴

Macaulay also noted in his essay on history that Sallust was guilty of presenting a work which was very like a party pamphlet, clever yet lacking consistency and fairness.⁴⁵

The dramatic genius of Tacitus caused Macaulay to acclaim him the greatest Latin historian,⁴⁶ while he felt that Tacitus was at times carried away with the dramatics of his narrative and caused the reader to be overwhelmed eventually by narrative.⁴⁷ Delineation of character in history was important to Macaulay, and he saw Tacitus as unrivaled in this particular style.⁴⁸

Macaulay seemed never to have been neutral concerning any of the numerous historians whose works he read and studied. His comments were always definite. There were several historians' works which prompted only adverse comments from Macaulay: Vellius Paterculus was accused of ranting, employing too much bombast which certainly made

⁴⁴Prevelyan, op. cit., I, 410-411.

⁴⁵Macaulay, op. cit., XI, 209.

⁴⁶Ibid., XI, 211.

⁴⁷Loc. cit.

⁴⁸Ibid., XI, 212.

his works unfit as histories;⁴⁹ Trebellius Capitolinus and Vopiscus were undoubtedly two of the worst historians ever to have written;⁵⁰ Lucan was too partial to be a good historian.⁵¹ His list of ancient historians to whom he turned for guidance in the conception of his own history was almost endless. In addition to those cited above, he also read Fra Paolo, Davila, Guicciardini, Machiavelli, Demosthenes, Isocrates, Lysias, Diodorus Siculus, Quintus Curtius, Longus, Pliny, Ammianus Marcellinus, Statius, Quintilian, Chrysostom, Linginus, Augustin, Caesar, and Hirtius.⁵² When Macaulay turned to modern historians, he read just as avidly and thoroughly as he had in the ancients. Once again, he read these historians in their original languages so that he might more accurately judge the validity of their histories.

After mastering German, Macaulay turned to the histories of Niebuhr, conceding that Niebuhr apparently had learning superior to his, but that Niebuhr lacked the judgment which Macaulay was able to bring to his own historical

⁴⁹Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 410.

⁵⁰Ibid., II, 228.

⁵¹Ibid., I, 402.

⁵²Ibid., I, 400.

writings.⁵³ He felt that Niebuhr, unable to judge causes and effects, asked his readers to accept too much on faith.⁵⁴ The style of the German historian, Schiller, held great appeal for Macaulay. After reading the History of the Thirty Years' War, Macaulay acclaimed Schiller for his " . . . very just and deep thought, conveyed in language so popular and agreeable that dunces would think him superficial."⁵⁵ However, Schiller did not escape Macaulay's criticism, for after reading Schiller's Jean of Aro, he bluntly stated that Schiller had been guilty of the violation of facts, an indefensible crime.⁵⁶

Concerning other historians, Macaulay was even more critical. He felt that Botta, the author of History of the American War, did not misrepresent history from partiality, which he recognized as a fault of many historians, but rather from ignorance. Macaulay added that Botta's style was also at fault for being too affected.⁵⁷ He stated that Pompeii by Bulwer was clever and filled with learning, yet

⁵³Ibid., I, 384.

⁵⁴Loc. cit.

⁵⁵Ibid., I, 407.

⁵⁶Ibid., II, 249.

⁵⁷Ibid., II, 44.

lacked much.⁵⁸ Macaulay always saw cleverness as a fault in history writing. While touring Italy in 1838, he read History by Smollett. His opinion of the work accused Smollett of " . . . carelessness, partiality, passion, idle invective, gross ignorance of facts, and crude general theories"⁵⁹

In other moderns, St. Simon, Hume, Robertson, Voltaire, and Gibbon, Macaulay found much merit; however, as he remarked in his journal of December 7, 1849, "I have a conception of history more just, I am confident, than theirs. The execution is another matter. But I hope to improve."⁶⁰

Macaulay was highly opinionated, and the reading of historians, both good and bad, did not seem to alter his opinions; rather, his reading merely re-confirmed his faith in them. He keenly felt the necessity of recording England's history in the manner in which he determined history should be recorded. This decision he indicated in a letter to Thomas Flower Ellis written on December 30, 1835, from Calcutta:

⁵⁸Loc. cit.

⁵⁹Ibid., II, 37.

⁶⁰Quoted in Trevelyan, II, 232.

What my course of life will be when I return to England is very doubtful. But I am more than half determined to abandon politics, and to give myself wholly to letters; to undertake some great historical work which may be at once the business and the amusement of my life⁶¹

After further meditation upon the decision affecting his immediate future, Macaulay announced that he did not understand how a man could choose the coarse life of politics over the elegant life afforded the man of literature.⁶² Thus, he firmly revealed his intentions of embarking on a life of literary endeavor upon his return to England.

When he returned to England, he pledged himself to begin his history during the spring of 1839.⁶³ Indeed, he had, by this time, worked out a tentative plan for the history. Roughly, there were to be three sections: the first would begin with the Revolution and end with the start of Sir Robert Walpole's administration; the second would cover Walpole's administration and end with the American War; and the third would begin with the American War and end, possibly, with the reign of George IV.⁶⁴ He felt, therefore,

⁶¹Ibid., I, 387.

⁶²Abbott, op. cit., p. 7.

⁶³Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 388.

⁶⁴Ibid., II, 19.

that

The "History" would then be an entire view of all the transactions which took place, between the Revolution which brought the Crown into harmony with the Parliament, and the Revolution which brought the Parliament into harmony with the nation.⁶⁵

The writing of the history was constantly on Macaulay's mind--What form would it take? Whose style would he imitate? From whom would he borrow, if anyone? Finally, he decided that his history would be written to interest and please readers ordinarily repelled by histories.⁶⁶ To Macaulay, a book which was not, first of all, amusing had failed in the prime recommendation for all books.⁶⁷ Thus, he desired that his narratives should read " . . . as if they had been spoken off, and . . . flow as easily as table-talk."⁶⁸ He insisted that the historian should not forget the gifts of the drama and the novel; for if he capitalizes upon these gifts, his history will be written with vividness and imagination. Furthermore, he advocated that the historian will need to be cognizant of selectivity, to recognize

⁶⁵Ibid., II, 20.

⁶⁶Ibid., II, 236.

⁶⁷Loc. cit.

⁶⁸Quoted in Trevelyan, II, 238.

when

. . . a little exaggeration, a little suppression, a judicious use of epithets, a watchful and searching scepticism with respect to the evidence on one side, a convenient credulity with respect to every report or tradition on the other⁶⁹

can present the desired impression of character or incident. He added that the historian cannot ignore careful research and reporting of facts. Thus, did Macaulay repeatedly outline in his essays and journal entries his set of requirements for the writing of history. The question, obviously, was whether or not he could abide by these ideals, or justify their omissions in his own finished work.

The next several years found him thinking, planning, and working always with the projected history in his mind.

In his journal for 1838, he wrote:

. . . I have thought a good deal during the last few days about my "History." The great difficulty of a work of this kind is the beginning. How is it to be joined on to the preceding events? Where am I to commence it? I can not plunge, slap-dash, into the middle of events and characters. I can not, on the other hand, write a history of the whole reign of James the Second as a preface to the history of William the Third; and if I did, a history of Charles the Second would still be equally necessary, as a preface to that of the reign of James the Second But after much consideration I think that I can manage, by the help of an introductory chapter or two, to glide imperceptible into the full current of my narrative. I am more and more in love with the subject. I really think that posterity will not willingly let my book

⁶⁹Macaulay, op. cit., XI, 225.

die.⁷⁰

His first reference to actual writing beyond the thinking-planning stage was entered in his journal on Friday, May 9, 1839:

I began my "History" with a sketch of the early revolution of England. Pretty well; but a little too stately and rhetorical.⁷¹

However, he did not inform Napier of his firm personal commitment to the history task until on November 5, 1841, when in a letter he wrote, "I have at last begun my historical labors."⁷² He continued in this letter to say that he felt certain that his history would supply a " . . . vast lacking in literature."⁷³

Although he had finally begun to work upon his long planned-for history, he accepted a cabinet appointment which frequently thereafter interfered with his literary labors.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this appointment was a definite feather in his political cap, for, even though he was not yet forty, he had risen from a rather humble state to that of Secretary

⁷⁰Quoted in Trevelyan, II, 37-38.

⁷¹Quoted in Trevelyan, II, 64.

⁷²Ibid., II, 95.

⁷³Loc. cit.

⁷⁴Abbott, op. cit. p. 10.

of War. It was this appointment which earned him the nickname which he was always to retain, for the Times, a foe of the Whig party, directed its Whig attacks directly upon Macaulay and gave him the label of "Mr. Babble-Tongue Macaulay."⁷⁵

Macaulay's brilliant speeches in the House made him very popular, and he became increasingly active in politics. His personal popularity made many of his associates and readers eager for the appearance of the much talked-of history. Consequently, Macaulay, increasingly feeling this pressure to complete at least two volumes of his history, began to spend more and more time in concentration upon his writing. In 1845, he vowed to devote his time exclusively to the history until the two volumes were completed. This avowal led one of his political constituents to claim that Macaulay was more interested in his "History" than in heading the business at hand.⁷⁶ In fact, this constituent carried the idea still further, saying that Macaulay suffered from "overtalking" and "underlistening."⁷⁷

Finally, in 1848, the long awaited first and second volumes of the history were published. Macaulay was, at

⁷⁵Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 65.

⁷⁶Ibid., II, 161.

⁷⁷Loc. cit.

times, filled with self-doubt about the success of these books, but his friends and relatives felt assured that the publication would be a success.⁷⁸ Wrote Macaulay:

The state of my own mind is this: when I compare my book with what I imagine history ought to be, I feel dejected and ashamed; but when I compare it with some histories which have a high repute, I feel re-assured.⁷⁹

The book was, nevertheless, a tremendous success, even to winning over many of Macaulay's adversaries.⁸⁰ Typical of the praise of Macaulay's acquaintances was this statement by Lord Halifax:

. . . I can not tell you how grateful all lovers of order and of civilized freedom, ought to be to you for having so set before them the History of our Revolution of 1688.⁸¹

Other, more astute, criticisms will be discussed in a later portion of this study.

Macaulay still had much writing to do to complete the entire history as he had previously intended to do. However, his phenomenal popularity returned him to his seat in the House of Commons, and his history work almost completely stopped.⁸² He resumed work in 1853 and worked

⁷⁸Abbott, op. cit., p. 13.

⁷⁹Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 205.

⁸⁰Loc. cit.

⁸¹Loc. cit.

⁸²Ibid., II, 319-320.

diligently for two years. In 1855, the second part of the history was completed.⁸³ Once again, Macaulay felt some reservation about the success of the third and fourth volumes, but in Macaulay fashion, on November 29, 1855, he recorded in his journal the following statement: ". . . the general sterility, the miserable enervated state of literature, is all in my favor."⁸⁴ In addition he confessed:

On the whole, I think that it must do speaking of part two. The only competition which, as far as I perceive, it has to dread, is that of the two former volumes. Certainly no other history of William's reign is either so trustworthy or so readable.⁸⁵

By January of 1856, he was assured of the success of the second part of his history.⁸⁶ His public had overwhelmingly accepted the new volumes.

When, because of ill health, he retired from Parliament in 1856, he seemed to lose all interest in party politics and rarely thereafter became involved in House matters.⁸⁷ His life settled into one of confinement which he chose to spend in reading and preparing of the final

⁸³Ibid., II, 322.

⁸⁴Quoted in Trevelyan, II, 323.

⁸⁵Loc. cit.

⁸⁶Ibid., II, 324.

⁸⁷Ibid., II, 331.

volume of the history. The final, fifth volume, was published posthumously in 1861.⁸⁸

⁸⁸Macaulay, op. cit., I, xi.

CHAPTER II

CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM RELATED TO MACAULAY'S HISTORY

When the history finally appeared in print, it caused a great furor, as was to be expected of a work which had been so widely discussed and so long awaited. As Macaulay had desired, his volumes of history were ones which replaced current novels as popular reading.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, which was usually loathe to praise Macaulay, did concede that Macaulay had ". . . produced the most popular book of this time."⁸⁹ However, this concession was tempered as follows: "Everybody reads--everybody admires--but nobody believes in Mr. Macaulay."⁹⁰ The fact that Macaulay had produced the most popular book of the time did not make the book a history, according to Blackwood's.

The Gentleman's Magazine wrote in February of 1856 that Macaulay will undoubtedly be given the honor of having written the most ". . . important historical work that has

⁸⁹"Macaulay," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXX (August, 1856), 130.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 128.

been published in our day and country."⁹¹ Also professing the tremendous success of the history was The Edinburgh Review, the magazine for which Macaulay had successfully written for a number of years. The magazine noted that the triumphs of the history had been "brilliant beyond example."⁹² The article noted still further examples of its widespread acceptance with the exaggerated statement that "Its rhetorical power filled the world with admiration"⁹³ The popular reception of Macaulay's work could not be refuted, although Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine claimed that the history was too English and lacked references to the continent which were vital to English history.⁹⁴ This fact did not deter the sales or the reading of Macaulay's history, and, during the next several years, copies were to be translated and published in Polish, Danish, Swedish, Italian, French, Dutch, Spanish, Hungarian, Russian, Bohemian, and Persian, while in Germany, six rival translators were working on editions.⁹⁵ In his

⁹¹ "Macaulay's History of England," Gentleman's Magazine, CC (February, 1856), 138.

⁹² "Macaulay's History of England," The Edinburgh Review, CV (January, 1857), 142.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 142.

⁹⁴ "Macaulay's History of England," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXV (April, 1849), 399.

⁹⁵ Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 328.

journal entry of October 25, 1849, Macaulay, in typical fashion, wrote about the favorable reviews given his history by German, American, and French reviewers; such comments, he felt, adequately answered English critics who claimed that the history would have only local merit.⁹⁶

No contemporary of Macaulay seemed to read and remain neutral toward the volumes of history. Friends, relatives, and lay readers were so pleased with the work that they were loathe to criticize Macaulay because of his partiality or for his obvious inaccuracies.⁹⁷ However, professional critics displayed mixed attitudes toward the history. From studies of criticisms written by Macaulay's contemporaries, one concludes that most of his critics were initially favorable toward the history, but as time passed and a more studied opinion could be forthcoming, the many errors in the history were more bluntly noted.

John Morley said that Macaulay lacked a sense of doom, and wrote that Macaulay eventually would be prized as a "master of literary art," but not as a historian.⁹⁸ It was his contention that Macaulay's work would fade away

⁹⁶ Ibid., I, 231.

⁹⁷ Ibid., I, 380.

⁹⁸ John Morley, Critical Miscellanies, p. 290.

because of a lack of "presentiment of the eve," the feeling of the difficulty and interests which will affect men tomorrow.⁹⁹ He held that Macaulay was guilty of providing the reader with only the remote past, and with nothing better to equip men to face the present or the future. In Morley's words, Macaulay " . . . seems hardly to have dreamed."¹⁰⁰

Macaulay's biographer, Trevelyan, wrote that Macaulay engaged in an astounding amount of research in order to validate his statistical information.¹⁰¹ He visited sites of historical events, wrote numerous letters to churchmen, local magistrates, and elderly citizens who he felt could possibly aid him in his historical accounting. Nevertheless, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine even doubted whether the books could be labeled as histories, although they were very readable as narratives. This journal's left-handed compliment to Macaulay was that he drew his historical characters as real men and women " . . . to be loved, hated, feared, or despised."¹⁰² Blackwood's even concluded

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁰⁰Loc. cit.

¹⁰¹Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 192-193.

¹⁰²"Lord Macaulay and Marlborough," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXV (June, 1859), 661.

that it was this striving for effect that lead to Macaulay's untrustworthiness as historian. According to Blackwood's, Macaulay became so absorbed in character delineation that,

. . . documents were suppressed or garbled, dates transposed, half sentences read as whole ones, witnesses of the most infamous character paraded as pure and unimpeachable, but the very gutters of Grub Street and St. Giles's are raked for anonymous filth of the foulest description to cast on the unhappy object of the wrath of the historian.¹⁰³

The journal felt that Macaulay was guilty of championing and condemning the same character trait, depending upon which historical character he was describing. Blackwood's saw this method as a serious failing in any historian, whose duty they felt it was to ". . . mete out with unsparring hand the judgment of posterity to all."¹⁰⁴ This failure was particularly distressing to his contemporary reviewers in his treatment of William of Orange. In every case, Macaulay upheld William and blamed William's subordinates for his failures and cruelties. Blackwood's felt that Macaulay was too partisan and stated that it was his fervid attachment to party traditions and principles that led him to the historical errors which he created.¹⁰⁵ Eventually,

¹⁰³Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁴"Lord Macaulay and the Massacre of Glencoe," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXVI (July, 1859), 7.

¹⁰⁵"Lord Macaulay and Dundee," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXVIII (August, 1860), 155.

thereafter, Blackwood's, Gentleman's Magazine, and The Edinburgh Review all published a series of articles noting the historical inaccuracies of Macaulay's work. These reactions, however, were, in varying degrees, condemning. Blackwood's criticisms were constantly the most severe; criticisms in the Gentleman's Magazine were moderate; while The Edinburgh Review was inclined to excuse Macaulay for his errors.

In issue after issue, Blackwood's printed articles blasting Macaulay for his inaccuracies, presenting studies quoting Macaulay's History as opposed to more reliable authorities and noting the exaggerations and discrepancies. In a June, 1859 article, one finds:

He is beyond comparison the greatest master of brilliant and unscrupulous fiction that has ever adorned the language or disgraced the literature of England.¹⁰⁶

The same article also wrote:

. . . Lord Macaulay is not to be trusted either to narrate facts accurately, to state evidence truly, or to award the judgment of History with impartiality.¹⁰⁷

The article's culminating remark challenging Macaulay's ability as historian was

¹⁰⁶"Lord Macaulay and Marlborough," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXIV (June, 1859), 676.

¹⁰⁷Loc. cit.

The poison Macaulay's account of Marlborough is spread far and wide.¹⁰⁸

In addition to his obvious glossing over of the character of William of Orange, Blackwood's regretted Macaulay's biased description of the Highlands. In an issue printed in August, 1859, it was stated that Macaulay's treatment of his own ancestors was libelous and produced only a "gross caricature"¹⁰⁹ of the Highland people. Here Blackwood's challenged Macaulay's selection of authorities, accusing him of choosing unknown authorities (Richard Frank and William Cleland) and ill-reputed authorities, or whichever suited his purpose at the moment. The article went still further in stating that all one needed to describe the Highlands as Macaulay did was ". . . a volume of contemporary lampoons, and bundle of political songs, or a memory in which such things are stored, and which may save the trouble of reference."¹¹⁰

In still other instances, the article accused Macaulay of using as his historical source, Oldmixon, and then, noting later in his history that Oldmixon was the

¹⁰⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁹"Lord Macaulay and the Highlands of Scotland," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXVI (August, 1859), 162.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 174.

least trustworthy of all historians.¹¹¹ The article also claimed Macaulay's lack of humor and perception led him to misinterpretation of what he had read.¹¹²

In August, 1860, Blackwood's wrote that Macaulay would go to extremes to further his dramatic presentation of history:

It is painful to observe, and difficult to believe, the extent to which Lord Macaulay has considered himself entitled to garble, alter, and pervert the authorities he quotes¹¹³

The article chastized Macaulay for his failure to make necessary corrections in future printings. It cites the fact that a Professor Aytoun, a Claverhouse authority, had challenged Macaulay on facts related to Claverhouse, but that even though Macaulay admitted the errors he made no attempt to correct his account.¹¹⁴ Blackwood's article contained one last note on Macaulay's selection of authorities which was his constant referral to Wodrow, even

¹¹¹"Lord Macaulay and Marlborough," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXV (June, 1859), 673.

¹¹²"Lord Macaulay and the Highlands of Scotland," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXVI (August, 1859), 169.

¹¹³"Lord Macaulay and Dundee," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXVII (August, 1860), 159.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 158.

though Wodrow's History had been denounced by the Whig party as "a collection of lies and groundless stories."¹¹⁵ The article further stated that ". . . year after year, edition after edition, Lord Macaulay has given the trash of Wodrow to the public, backed by his own high authority."¹¹⁶ Blackwood's accused Macaulay of having written with preconceived notions, stating that Macaulay first decided upon his own view, then proceeded to prove it, frequently disregarding pages and pages of information in his attempt to find one line which supported his point, thereby resulting in quite a different aspect of history.¹¹⁷

In Gentleman's Magazine, Macaulay is treated in a more kindly manner, although his depiction of William Penn was challenged by the journal. On the other hand, the magazine partially defended Macaulay's handling of the Penn episode, stating that Macaulay had never said that Penn was guilty of accepting bribes, but that he had merely implied this theory.¹¹⁸ The article ended with the statement that

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

¹¹⁶ Loc. cit.

¹¹⁷ "Macaulay," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXX (September, 1856), 366.

¹¹⁸ "Mr. Macaulay and William Penn," Gentleman's Magazine, CXXXVI (July, 1850), 8.

Macaulay was not justified in using facts until they had been proved. In a later issue, April, 1851, Gentleman's notes that a new biography of William Penn had appeared in which the author charged that Macaulay's facts were inaccurately interpreted.¹¹⁹

Earlier, in 1849, Macaulay had noted in his journal that the Society of Friends had taken issue with his treatment of William Penn in chapters five and eight.¹²⁰ However, according to Macaulay, he had successfully defended his statements and the affair ended pleasantly.¹²¹ In 1857, Macaulay added a footnote to his history which supported his position upon the William Penn account. Macaulay was thoroughly satisfied with his own accounting of the affair and concluded the footnote as follows:

Such is the evidence on one side. I am not aware that any evidence deserving a serious answer has been produced on the other (1857).¹²²

To further indicate the tempered treatment of Macaulay's History by Gentleman's Magazine is the statement printed in February, 1856, that even though some of

¹¹⁹"Mr. Macaulay and William Penn," Gentleman's Magazine, (April, 1851), 394.

¹²⁰Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 218.

¹²¹loc. cit.

¹²²Macaulay, op. cit., III, 346.

Macaulay's judgments would undoubtedly prove false, the book would, nevertheless, stand as

. . . a noble example of authorship, a triumphant vindication of the necessity of the Revolution, and a demonstration of the justice of the principles on which it proceeded.¹²³

This article concluded that the book's greatest shortcomings lay in the fact that Macaulay was given to too much elaboration, that he was striving too strenuously to create an effect.¹²⁴

When The Edinburgh Review reviewed Macaulay's History, in July, 1849, they could note only one fault: the danger of being carried away by description " . . . were it not tempered and chastised in our author by a logical head, an accurate memory, and an instinctive love for fair play."¹²⁵ When Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine noted five specific themes in error, the Duke of Marlborough, the massacre of Glencoe, the Highlands of Scotland, Viscount Dundee, and William Penn, The Edinburgh Review answered the magazine by asking whether a man writing of fifteen years

¹²³"Macaulay's History of England," Gentleman's Magazine, (February, 1856), 128.

¹²⁴Loc. cit.

¹²⁵"Macaulay's History of England," The Edinburgh Review, XC (July, 1849), 291.

of great events is not to be permitted a "casual" slip.¹²⁶

Noted English men of letters also expressed opinions on the History. An acquaintance and sometimes friend of Macaulay, Thomas Carlyle, came into this discussion. The attitudes of the two men were vastly different. Carlyle thought Macaulay too materialistic, too much the Whig, and claimed that this attitude was evident in the history. He expressed further disappointment in the history, because Macaulay had violated the idea that histories should be written about heroes.¹²⁷ According to Carlyle, the books lacked substance; they were clear, definite and pleasant reading but lacked challenge.¹²⁸ He also viewed Macaulay as a "Whig Evangelist" with actually no story to tell of a period that did not need telling.¹²⁹ This attitude did not prevail in all of Carlyle's writing, for, at times, he thought Macaulay had tremendous literary capacity. When once asked who was at the head of English literature, Carlyle answered that Macaulay undoubtedly was.¹³⁰ From an

¹²⁶"Macaulay's History of England (Fifth Volume)," The Edinburgh Review, CXIV (October, 1861), 288.

¹²⁷R. C. Beatty, "Macaulay and Carlyle," PQ, XVIII (January, 1939), 31.

¹²⁸David Alec Wilson, Carlyle to Threescore-and-Ten, p. 15.

¹²⁹Loc. cit.

¹³⁰David Alec Wilson, Carlyle at His Zenith, p. 36.

entry in his journal on January 6, 1849, one assumes that Carlyle thought better of the history upon first perusal:

How admirable they are--full of generous impulses, judicial impartiality, wide research, deep thought, picturesque description, and sustained eloquence! Was history ever better written?¹³¹

Nor was this the only favorable criticism offered the public when Macaulay's History appeared. The authorities cited above also praised the merits of Macaulay's accounting, as well as condemned the faults of his historical narrative. In one area, all critics seemed to agree--Macaulay was the master of eloquent style; his rhetoric left the reader eagerly anticipating the next narrative, the next superb character description. The Edinburgh Review presented the ultimate compliment to Macaulay in printing the following account on July, 1849:

In his general view of the history of these times, we have nothing to condemn or to suggest. It seems to us, from first to last, fresh, coherent, and true.¹³²

Indeed, Macaulay's character delineations impressed all readers, for he had the skill to make historical personalities seem to live once again. Gentleman's Magazine referred to his character descriptions as coming from "the

¹³¹Quoted in Trevelyan, II, 172.

¹³²"Macaulay's History of England," The Edinburgh Review, XC (July, 1849), 292.

canvass of Macaulay,"¹³³ suggesting his exceptional ability as a verbal painter.

Blackwood's also acknowledged the power of Macaulay's descriptive narrative. This magazine's praise for his picture-making abilities was expressed as follows:

No one else has ever written history in a style so clear and luminous; no one before him has ever disclosed to us so brilliant and animated a panorama, so lifelike a presentation of the past.¹³⁴

In this article of August, 1856, it was further explained that Macaulay's work could be judged only as art and not as history. However, it concluded that as art it failed because it lacked "heart."¹³⁵ The feelings and emotions of the artist were lacking and the narratives were merely "stylized vignettes." Once again, it would seem that Macaulay's worship of style got in the way of his historical accounting. Blackwood's gave Macaulay full credit for power, research, and vast knowledge which were combined to capture the reader with a magical influence,¹³⁶ but which could

¹³³"Macaulay's History of England," Gentleman's Magazine, CC (February, 1856), 133.

¹³⁴"Macaulay," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXX (August, 1856), 129.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 133.

¹³⁶"Lord Macaulay and Dundee," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXVIII (August, 1860), 155.

also trap the unwary reader into accepting Macaulay's accounts as authoritative truths. Although Macaulay's work may have lacked "heart," the critics gave him credit for being exceptionally learned in both modern and ancient lore.¹³⁷ They were aware of the fact that his background had encompassed both poetry and prose of English and continental history, possibly accounting for the skill that Blackwood's said was "imbued with the soul of poetry."¹³⁸ This poetical ability Blackwood's compared with the ability of Alexander Pope, calling Macaulay "the Pope of English prose," asserting that Macaulay's art of abbreviation, presenting two facts in a single line, made his work reminiscent of Pope.¹³⁹

Although there was apparently much to disapprove and much with which to differ in Macaulay's work, the following excerpt appeared:

. . . we are heartily rejoiced to think that a story so brilliant, lifelike, and vivid, a chronicle so dignified and able, should mirror forth to the public of England the beginning of the modern era of national history--the groundwork and the foundations of the liberties and blessings of our own time.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷"Macaulay's History of England," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXV (April, 1849), 387.

¹³⁸Loc. cit.

¹³⁹Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁰"Macaulay," Blackwood's Edinburgh Review, LXXX (August, 1856), 141.

A critic in Gentleman's Magazine echoed the sentiment in this way:

The book has . . . taken its stand as a classic, although . . . in point of authority it falls as far below many well-known works which treat of the same period, as it rises above them in fascination.¹⁴¹

While Macaulay expressed some concern as to the reception of the History, his buoyant, optimistic attitude quickly dispelled these fears. As early as 1833, he had made this prophetic statement to his sister, Hannah:

We see in our own time that the books written by public men of note are generally rated at more than their value¹⁴²

When advised of the criticism in some of the leading publications, Blackwood's particularly, Macaulay's defense was to label such writing as "trash."¹⁴³ He noted that the Blackwood's critics had always held a "pronounced hostility" toward him for political reasons.¹⁴⁴ Carlyle's criticism was not effective as far as Macaulay was concerned, because he felt Carlyle was "muddle-headed" anyway.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹"Obituary," Gentleman's Magazine, CCVIII (February, 1860), 184.

¹⁴²Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 286.

¹⁴³Ibid., I, 123.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., I, 134.

¹⁴⁵"Macaulay and Carlyle," PQ, XVIII, (January, 1939), 34.

In reference to the criticisms of his elaborate handling of minute details, Macaulay wrote:

Some people may imagine that I infer too much from slight indications; but no one who has not soaked his mind with the transitory literature of the day is really entitled to judge.¹⁴⁶

One wonders at the attitude of a man interested in history recording who could make the following journal entry: "I found one serious mistake in my 'History.' I wonder whether anybody else will find it out."¹⁴⁷ There are no recorded journal entries which indicate that he corrected future printings. At another time, Macaulay wrote to his sister:

My accuracy as to facts . . . I owe to a cause which many men would not confess. It is due to my love of castlebuilding. The past is, in my mind, soon constructed into a romance.¹⁴⁸

With such an attitude toward history writing, Macaulay could no longer be disturbed by the jibes of a few critics. After reviewing his first edition, Macaulay wrote: ". . . when I look up any part, and read it, I can not but see that it is better than the other works on the same subject."¹⁴⁹ However, Macaulay felt this self-assurance was

¹⁴⁶ Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 197.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., II, 324.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., I, 172.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., II, 267.

scant comfort, since the other historians of the period, Smollett, Kennett, Somerville, Ralph, Belsham, Lord Dungannon, he thought to be exceedingly dull.¹⁵⁰

How did Macaulay view the role of historian that he could hold such an egotistical attitude toward his own history and regard so lightly serious criticism by his peers? As the evidence shows, he had actually laid the ground work for his history at a very early time in his career. In addition to a period of intensive and extensive reading, he had published essays as early as 1828, outlining the historian's role as he interpreted it.¹⁵¹ In the essay, "Hallam," published in September, 1828,¹⁵² he lamented the fact that there were ". . . good historical romances and good historical essays;"¹⁵³ but as yet, no one had seen fit to weld the two into a truly worthwhile history. He saw history as "a compound of poetry and philosophy."¹⁵⁴

To make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the society of a great man or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of human flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as

¹⁵⁰Loc. cit.

¹⁵¹Macaulay, op. cit., XI, 239.

¹⁵²Loc. cit.

¹⁵³Loc. cit.

¹⁵⁴Loc. cit.

personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb; to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture, these parts of the duty which properly belongs to the historian have been appropriated by the historical novelist. On the other hand, to extract the philosophy of history, to direct our judgment of events and men, to trace the connection of causes and effects, and to draw from the occurrences of former times general lessons of moral and political wisdom, has become the business of a distinct class of writers.¹⁵⁵

Macaulay wrote in the essay, "History," that this graphic side of history could best be shown in miniature.¹⁵⁶ He would consider no detail too insignificant if it contributed to the presentation of the whole illustration. It was to be a matter of careful selection and rejection as to which details aid the telling of historical truth. His vast store of knowledge served him in good stead, here, and he frequently broke the narrative to give the reader glimpses of every detail surrounding the main stream of his story. Detail was added to detail until the most insignificant event became a complicated exercise in style writing. Frequently, in the height of action, he still employed the style. In his accounting of the London riots, his additions are particularly evident:

¹⁵⁵Ibid., XI, 239-240.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., XI, 233.

So it was now in London. When the night, the longest night, as it chanced of the year approached, forth came from every den of vice, from the bear-garden at Hockley, and from the labyrinth of tippling-houses and brothels in the Friars, thousands of house-breakers and highwaymen, cut-purses and ring-droppers. With these were mingled thousands of idle apprentices, who wished merely for the excitement of a riot.¹⁵⁷

In chapter V, during the exciting narrative of the death of Monmouth, Macaulay displayed another superb example of his use of miniature. He wrote of Monmouth's burial at St. Peter's Chapel, and broke into the narrative thus: "In truth there is no sadder spot on the earth than that little cemetery."¹⁵⁸ then, he proceeded to write of the many unfortunates buried in this place. He concluded the description with a typical Macaulay truism: "Such was the dust with which the dust of Monmouth mingled."¹⁵⁹ After one and a half pages of similar detail, he returned to the narrative.

Continuing with his definition of the historian's role, Macaulay stated in the "History" essay that the best historians, even of modern times, had become too abstract, permitting their truths to be distorted by their reason.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., IV, 268-269.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., II, 341.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., II, 342.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., XI, 224.

He believed that had they but employed imagination this disaster could possibly have been avoided. Throughout his history, Macaulay never failed on this point. Imagination held full sway; deep, thought-provoking questions never encumbered his narrative or challenged his reader. With so active an imagination, he frequently interspersed his narrative with direct quotations attributed to historical personages. Some of these passages he credited to various historical sources; while others, truly the more entertaining, he never bothered to verify. He frequently would delve into the very thoughts of men and include his concept of them in the account. For example, while telling of James II's most trying times, he wrote:

A new light flashed on the mind of the unhappy King.
He thought that he understood why he had been pressed
. . . .¹⁶¹

This passage is typical of the method of historical freedom which Macaulay employed.

The outline of the historian's duty, which Macaulay conceived quite early in his career, was never abandoned. Throughout his own vast historical accountings, he held to the notion that history should be picturesque and concrete, never logical and abstract. The Quarterly Review stated:

¹⁶¹Ibid., IV, 119.

By some peculiarity of his mental constitution he was also singularly impatient of uncertainty: . . . he hurried into dogmatism to escape doubts.¹⁶²

Macaulay never accepted the fact that there were some classes of thought on which certainties were unattainable.

Macaulay wrote that to present both sides of an issue served no purpose. He felt one was far more justified in portraying emphatically one distinct point of view, and insisted that this method was the only way to be concrete. He explained that if he were to maintain such a thought, his history would also have to be partisan. Macaulay, therefore, elected to make his history the champion of England's cause and, particularly, of the Whig party. Earlier he had written that the Whig story must be told, and he believed that he was the one to tell it.¹⁶³ Macaulay's attitudes were not unique but were the attitudes of the majority of the middle class. The self-confidence and patriotism of Macaulay actually represented the national thinking of his day.¹⁶⁴ Macaulay's advantage was his desire and ability to impart these attitudes to others through writing. It is not the purpose of this study to draw parallels between

¹⁶²Review - The Works of Lord Macaulay. Complete. Edited by his sister, Lady Trevelyan, "The Quarterly Review, CXXIV (April, 1868), 288.

¹⁶³Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 260.

¹⁶⁴Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 27.

contemporary Whig attitudes and the political attitudes to be found in Macaulay's history. However, this aspect cannot be completely ignored as it resulted in much of Macaulay's biased reporting to which his critics objected. Macaulay's belief in the superiority of modern England is too evident in the history to be ignored and is very typical of Whig thinking. This lauding of present-day conditions in view of past conditions seemed to be one of Macaulay's aims. The famed third chapter is one of numerous examples of Macaulay's efforts " . . . to depreciate the moral and social condition of the country of that day" ¹⁶⁵

However, throughout this chapter, evidence of Macaulay's lack of perception and his misuse of authorities abounds. Macaulay failed to recognize that many of the evils which he cited as belonging to the era of 1600 were still in evidence in 1840. The topics of the destruction of toll-gates, flooding of roads, murmuring against turnpikes he treated as disadvantages only of 1670. ¹⁶⁶ Macaulay impressed upon his reader that the contemporary increase in size of the English towns was a mark of progress, citing, again and again, cities that had grown from small villages

¹⁶⁵ "Mr. Macaulay's History of England," The Quarterly Review, LXXXIV (March, 1849), 381.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 385.

into thriving, busy metropolitan centers, but failing to recognize the superfluousness of these descriptions when population growth had increased from five and a half millions in 1670 to sixteen millions in 1840.¹⁶⁷ He saw every condition of Victorian life as a decided advantage over those in the late 1600's. For example, he described garret living of his day as being superior to the rich living of 1685;¹⁶⁸ he described the travel modes of his day as unbelievable in 1669;¹⁶⁹ he described the village of his day as owning books superior to those possessed by the early English scholarly churchman.¹⁷⁰ The very character of the English people, Macaulay noted, had changed. He felt that the people of his day were wiser, kinder, more sensitive, than the early Englishman.¹⁷¹ Modern Victorian England he saw as having undergone a moral change which resulted in a truly glorious age.¹⁷² While he credited part of the better life to chemistry and science, he also felt that part of the good life should be credited to

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 583.

¹⁶⁸ Macaulay, op. cit., II, 16-17.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., II, 44-58.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., II, 69-70.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., II, 105-106.

¹⁷² Ibid., II, 107-109.

" . . . the progress the nation has made in good sense, justice, and humanity."¹⁷³ Obviously, to Macaulay, this better existence could have resulted only from the revolution and the destruction of the powerful monarchy, further evidence of his Whig thinking.

When the Englishman became an islander in every respect, then his greatness began; Macaulay would not concede any superior traits to the continental influences.¹⁷⁴ His sense of nationalism was absolute. He wrote that the true Englishmen, who appeared around the thirteenth century, were " . . . a people inferior to none existing in the world."¹⁷⁵ He continued with " . . . English thinkers aspired to know, or dared to doubt, where bigots had been content to wonder and to believe."¹⁷⁶ The mediocrity of thinking of the great middle class, which he chose to join, held sway throughout his history where he eulogized their materialistic view of progress. To Macaulay and his followers, progress could be measured in the comfort of inns and of travel. After a visit to the Great Exhibition of 1851, the epitome of his middle class thinking, he wrote:

¹⁷³Ibid., II, 127.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., I, 19.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., I, 20.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., I, 23.

I never knew a sight which extorted from all ages, classes, and nations such unanimous and genuine admiration. I felt a glow of eloquence . . . come on me from the mere effect of the place¹⁷⁷

He went on to record:

England is so great that an Englishman cares little what others think of her, or how they talk of her.¹⁷⁸

It was this nationalistic attitude which Macaulay evidently wished to present in the history, an attitude which was also exemplified in the Whig party:

I look with pride on all that the Whigs have done for the cause of human freedom and of human happiness. I see them now, hard pressed, struggling with difficulties, but still fighting the good fight.¹⁷⁹

This struggle, of course, was non-violent, for Macaulay's panacea was the "noiseless-revolution theory."¹⁸⁰ He felt that England had achieved its greatness through " . . . patience, liberty, reason, and constitutional legislation."¹⁸¹

However, on perusal of the History, one sees a greater reason for Macaulay's conscious distortion of facts

¹⁷⁷Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 20.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., II, 228.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., II, 60.

¹⁸⁰William S. Knickerbocker, "Suet with No Plums," The Sewanee Review Quarterly, XLVII (April, 1939), 248.

¹⁸¹Loc. cit.

than that of the mere glossing-over of the Whig party. He knew that if he were to present a readable, popular history, it would have to be entertaining; he also knew that a mere recording of facts was not entertaining. Since Macaulay was not a profound thinker and did not have intuitive powers of perception, the only choice was to appeal to the reader through style. Effect became ". . . his aim, his end, his principle, his condition and criterion of success."¹⁸² To assure himself the following of readers of novels, he knew his account must be passionate and emotional. He could not afford to be neutral toward either characters or events. Upon reading only a few chapters of the history, one can clearly distinguish between Macaulay's heroes and Macaulay's villains. His vocabulary and vituperative powers were astounding in the character delineations of culprits in early English history. Terms like "audacity," "depravity," "barbarous," "infamy," and "wicked" would appear in the space of a single page of character description.¹⁸³ Apparently these vivid portrayals were written only for effect and without malice, as several

¹⁸²"The Works of Macaulay. Complete. Edited by his sister, Lady Trevelyan," The Quarterly Review, CXXIV (April, 1868), 289.

¹⁸³Macaulay, op. cit., II, 135.

critics of Macaulay described him as a kindly, generous, person who hated oppression and injustice.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, when describing William of Orange, Macaulay's hero, every attribute of the princely being was bestowed upon this man in a most extravagant, unbelievable manner. The following is evidence of his intemperate style:

The place which William . . . occupies in the history of England and of mankind is so great that it may be desirable to portray with some minuteness the lineaments of his character.

.

Nature had largely endowed William with the qualities of a great ruler¹⁸⁵

Despite his repeated description of himself with the phrase "impartial historian," his accounting of historical personages is not evidence of impartial history writing.

That Macaulay's desire to create an effect ensnared his pen and led him into making repeated inaccuracies is obvious. His straining for verbal effect frequently caused him to lose the point of his description. He was led to writing in truisms and epithets. His account of the Battle of London abounds in such style: "It seemed that all was

¹⁸⁴"The Works of Macaulay. Complete. Edited by his sister, Lady Trevelyan," The Quarterly Review, CXXIV (April, 1868), 288.

¹⁸⁵Macaulay, op. cit., III, 186-187.

over."¹⁸⁶ "All was havoc and confusion."¹⁸⁷ "Amidst the rout and uproar,"¹⁸⁸ "It was only on such occasions as this that the whole greatness of William's character appeared."¹⁸⁹ "Many fell on his right hand and on his left."¹⁹⁰ This style is retained throughout several pages of the battle description. Although these oratorical devices excite the lay reader, an in-depth reader of history feels burdened with the Gothic treatment of even ordinary events in history. An author of a review in The Quarterly Review of April, 1868, stated that Macaulay's work " . . . smacked strongly of the showman and the auctioneer."¹⁹¹

The article noted also:

Give Lord Macaulay an insulated fact or phrase, a scrap of a journal, or the tag end of a song, and on it, by the abused prerogative of genius, he would construct a theory of national or personal character which should confer undying glory or inflict indelible disgrace.¹⁹²

So engrossed was Macaulay in writing an entertaining history that he treated it almost like a romance,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., VIII, 224.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., VIII, 225.

¹⁸⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁸⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., VIII, 226.

¹⁹¹ "The Works of Macaulay, Complete. Edited by his sister, Lady Trevelyan," The Quarterly Review, CXXIV (April, 1868), 291.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 296.

actually presenting a style more like that of the novelist than that of the historian. The Quarterly Review asserted that Macaulay's design was " . . . the example and the success of the author of Waverley."¹⁹³ The history contains passages of beauty and variety which one rarely expects to find or does find in history writing.

Although behind many of the factual distortions lay Macaulay's desire to vindicate the Whig party, still greater was his desire to present a popular history. One contemporary critic wrote:

The conception of the History was bold, and so far as availing himself, like other novelists, of the fashion of the day to produce a popular and profitable effect, the experiment has been eminently successful.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³"Mr. Macaulay's History of England," The Quarterly Review, LXXXIV (March, 1849), 551.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 552.

CHAPTER III

MACAULAY'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTION THROUGH HIS HISTORY

If Macaulay's aims, as cited, were to tell the history of England with due justice to the Whig party and to relate it in such a manner as to be exceedingly popular, there is no doubt that he succeeded beyond even his egotistical expectations. Considering the first premise, Macaulay did present the Whig party in history, albeit, from a prejudiced, warped point of view, but nevertheless, with a distinct party view. His ". . . over-admiration for Whig greatness, over-leniency to Whig faults . . ." are everywhere in evidence.¹⁹⁵ He was prone to labeling anything as bigoted, intolerant, shameless, or cruel by the comprehensive title of Tory. When not directly stated, the implication was, nevertheless, very pointed. In contrast, every trait to be admired was accredited to the Whigs, quite directly. Macaulay felt strongly that the Whigs part in the history of England had to be told. It is unfortunate from the standpoint of historical accounting that he allowed his overconfidence in the times in which he lived

¹⁹⁵"Review - Macaulay's History of England," Gentleman's Magazine, (March, 1849), 277.

to overshadow his sense of accuracy. The man was such a firm part of the middle class in thought and action that he was actually unaware of provocative thought trends of the really great minds of his contemporaries. He failed to realize that many of the faults of men and nations recounted in his history were still present during his own day. He was too firmly convinced of the progressive improvement in England to be realistic. The superiority of the morality of the English soldier,¹⁹⁶ the superiority of present-day legislators,¹⁹⁷ the superiority of the morals of the Englishmen as opposed to those on the continent,¹⁹⁸ the very superiority of England in every way led him into gross exaggerations. These attitudes also led him into the too obvious premise of the superiority of the bloodless revolution as a panacea. The contrast of England before the Revolution with England after the Revolution is too sharp. Here, his oratorical gift overwhelmed the reader with the despicable condition of early England. Few could read these accounts and remain neutral concerning the glories of progress. In his journals were several comments related

¹⁹⁶Macaulay, op. cit., I, 22.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., II, 207.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., I, 244.

to the material progress of England which he found so commendable. In a letter (1850), Macaulay wrote:

. . . the last twenty-five years . . . have witnessed the greatest progress ever made in physical science --the greatest victories ever achieved by man over matter¹⁹⁹

His extreme pleasure with England's progress reached its climax with the 1851 Exhibition. He felt the Exhibition exceeded anything ever produced even by the Caesars:²⁰⁰

This Exhibition will long be remembered as a singularly happy year, of peace, plenty, good feeling, innocent pleasures, national glory of the best and purest sort.²⁰¹

His history, then, became a means of preparing the people for the proper acceptance of the greatness of their age. It enabled them to see the baseness of England prior to the "noiseless revolution," and then, the greatness to which the country aspired under the leadership of the Whigs.

Since people constantly strive to vindicate their beliefs and actions, Macaulay's history afforded comfort to the middle class reader. The glossing of mistakes, the discovery of the advantages in each catastrophe, even in the London fire in 1666, gave one a fine sense of

¹⁹⁹Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 222.

²⁰⁰Ibid., II, 248.

²⁰¹Ibid., II, 183.

security in his age:²⁰²

England's glory is a record of progress through an unending series of justifiable concessions to the inevitable when threatened catastrophes were averted, when strategic cohesions of warring partisans resulted in a temporary political calm only to result in swiftly subsequent repulsions which prepared the conditions for another political crisis.²⁰³

Such popularity of idea coupled with popularity of author insures a large measure of success for any book. The first two volumes of The History of England sold 13,000 copies in four months, and in 1855 when volumes three and four appeared, more than 26,500 copies were sold within six weeks.²⁰⁴ Thus, the author who wished to supplant novels with histories accomplished his feat.

The histories brought forth much comment, favorable and unfavorable. In some instances, Macaulay sought to defend himself; at other times, he ignored charges. A typical Macaulay answer to critics was the following:

. . . the place of books in the public estimation is fixed, not by what is written about them, but by what is written in them; and the author whose works are likely to live is very unwise if he stoops to wrangle with detractors whose works are certain to die.²⁰⁵

²⁰²Macaulay, op. cit., II, 91-92.

²⁰³Knickerbocker, op. cit., p. 247.

²⁰⁴Macaulay, op. cit., I, xi-xii.

²⁰⁵Trevelyan, op. cit., II, 209.

As to the works themselves, it is the opinion of this writer that they possess a grace and charm of style which is remarkable. The eloquence of phrase, the vividness of detail beggars apt description. Historical characters seem to spring alive; countrysides take on very real hues and contours when Macaulay describes them. However, the prejudice and inaccuracies cannot be ignored. Even for the non-student of history, these failings can be recognized as the volumes are read. Here, too, Macaulay had an answer:

The practice of distorting narrative into a conformity with theory is a vice not so unfavorable as at first sight it may appear to the interest of political science.²⁰⁶

Though the reader is aware of gross error in fact, when he is caught up by the narrative, these errors do not seem to matter. The reading of Macaulay's history is like novel reading; the pictures follow quickly one after another, detail heaped upon detail. Few readers can fail to respond to the narratives of Monmouth's abortive invasion, Alice Lisle's trial, John Brown's destruction, and many, many more similar accounts.

In literary studies, Macaulay's histories should not be by-passed. In historical studies, it would be most unwise to consider Macaulay an authority. There are no

²⁰⁶Macaulay, op. cit., XI, 227.

answers in Macaulay's history; there are only pictures,
but very eloquent pictures.

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