

**LONGMANS ENGLISH  
CLASSICS. MACAULAY'S  
LAYS OF ANCIENT ROME**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649530489

Longmans English Classics. Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome by Nott Flint

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**NOTT FLINT**

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Longmans' English Classics

MACAULAY'S  
LAYS OF ANCIENT ROME

EDITED

WITH NOTES AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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NEW YORK  
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.  
LONDON AND BOMBAY  
1905

20473, 26.35



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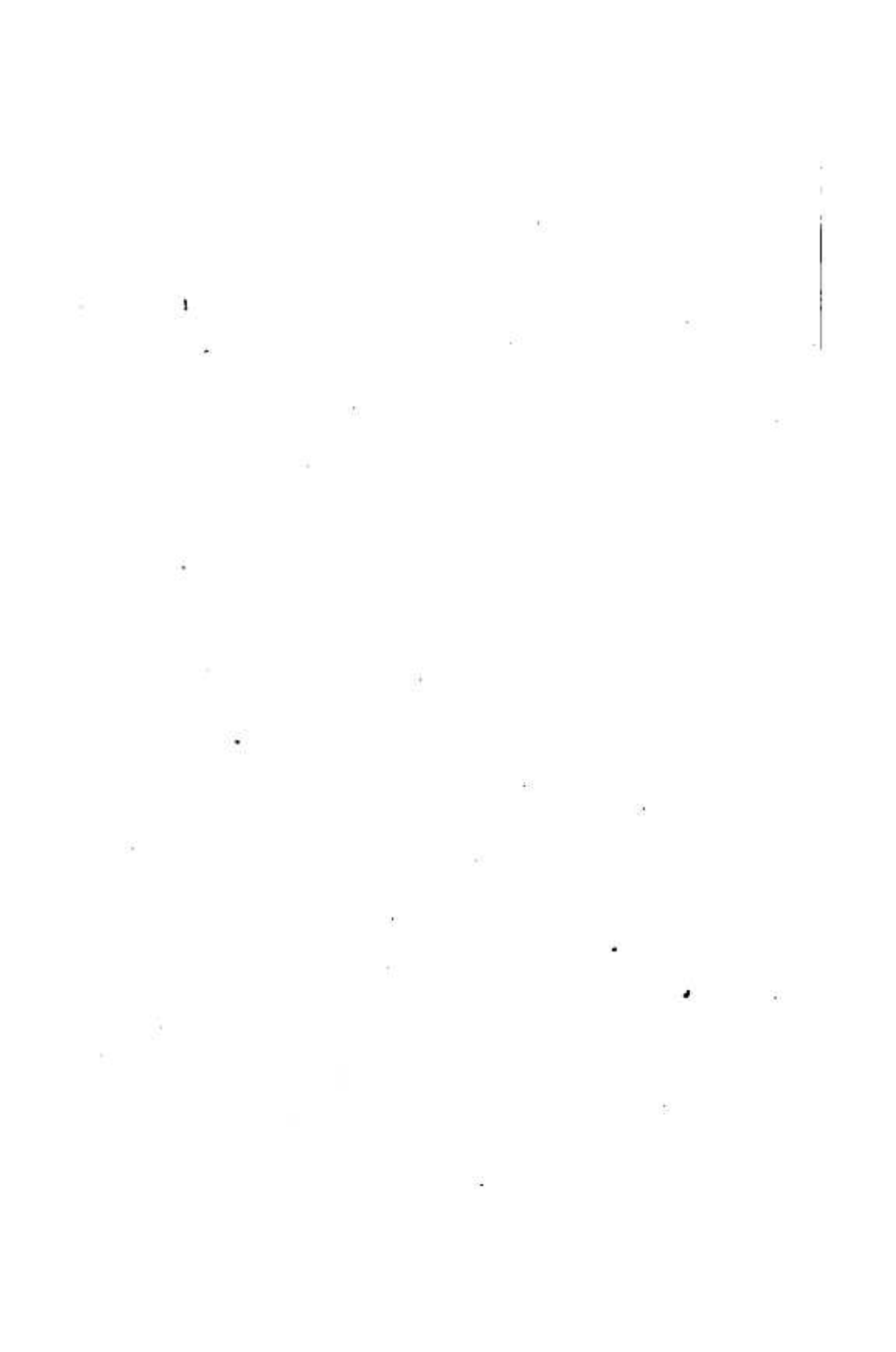
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## INTRODUCTION

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

ONCE Macaulay wrote to his niece Margaret that "he would rather be a poor man in a garret with plenty of books than a king who did not love reading." This was no idle remark; even when he was three years old he used to lie on the rug near the fire with a book. One of his father's servants tells how he used to perch beside her while she cleaned the silver, and explain to her out of a book as "big as himself," talking the while "quite printed words." Later, when he went to school, instead of giving his spare time to some form of athletics, as most of the boys did, he seized every moment for his reading. The one form of exercise he did take,—walking,—interfered not at all with his greatest pleasure. After his college days he could often be seen threading his way in crowded London streets, walking just as fast as the others, though his eyes were fixed upon a book. In 1834 he spent four months on a voyage to India. Afterwards he wrote of it: "I contented myself with being civil whenever I was with the other passengers, and took care to be with them as little as I could. . . . I never was left for so long a time so completely to my own resources; and I am glad to say that I found them quite sufficient to keep me cheerful and employed. During the whole voyage I read with keen and increasing enjoyment. I devoured Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, French, and English; folios, quartos, octavos, and duodecimos." Later he wrote home a list of his reading

for the year 1835—a list so filled with Greek and Latin classics that it almost gives one a headache to glance it over. Upon his return from India he gradually withdrew from public and from social life, and spent his time more and more among his books,—“the old friends who are never seen with new faces; who are the same in wealth and poverty, in glory and in obscurity,” he said of them. In 1859, he was found dead in his chair, and an open book lay on the table before him.

This “invincible love of reading,” appearing so soon and lasting to the end, is thoroughly characteristic; a study of it shows clearly the kind of man Macaulay was. Reading was at once his greatest pleasure and his greatest limitation. During his lifetime, he won great honor, titles, and wealth by his own writings, yet he loved reading far better than these things. He loved the members of his family with a quite remarkable affection; but in studying his life one feels that he could have borne the loss of every member better than of all his books. This intense pleasure in reading, almost a passion, may, to most of us, seem hard to understand; we agree with Stevenson that books are a “mighty bloodless substitute for life.” To fail to understand, however, why he preferred books to real life is to fail of understanding Macaulay, and so to fail of sympathy with him.

Very few men can feel the reality of books and of the people in them as Macaulay did. To him the people he read about were vividly real; or if there were no people, if it were a dry treatise on history, the author would become as real a person as if he were present in the room, for, pencil in hand, he would argue with, criticise, deny, or approve whatever that author said. “A stout-hearted, honest, brave man,” he wrote in the margin, of a man he admired. “The best archbishop of Canterbury since the

Reformation, except Tillotson," he noted against Grindal. His nephew, George Trevelyan, said that his uncle's "thoughts were often for weeks together more in Latium and Attica than in Middlesex;" that "Cicero was as real to him as Peel, and Curio as Stanley;" that he "cried over Homer with emotion and over Aristophanes with laughter;" that he could not read Demosthenes' "Oration on the Crown" even for the twentieth time "without striking his clenched fist, at least once a minute, on the arm of his easy chair." When he was fifty-one he wrote to his niece Margaret: "I finished the Iliad to-day. I had not read it through since the end of 1837. . . . I never admired the old fellow so much or was so strongly moved by him. . . . I read the last five books at a stretch during my walk to-day, and was at last forced to turn into a by-path, lest the parties of walkers should see me blubbering for imaginary beings, the creations of a ballad-maker who has been dead 2700 years." He read some books over and over again, always noting down in pencil the date of the new reading. And when he "opened for the tenth or fifteenth time some history, or memoir, or romance—every incident and almost every sentence of which he had by heart—his feeling was precisely that of meeting an old friend." Toward certain books he had the whimsical, personal feeling that other men had about people. "I read," he says, "Henderson's 'Ice-land' at breakfast—a favorite book with me. Why? How oddly we are made. Some books which I should not dream of opening at dinner please me at breakfast, and vice versa."

It may seem that a man who read so rapidly as Macaulay,—"he could take in the contents of a printed page at a glance,"—or who required to go over a book ten or fifteen times, must have had a bad memory. Yet quite the contrary is true. Letting him see either a rubbishy bit out of