

**MACAULAY'S  
LAYS  
OF ANCIENT ROME**

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Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome by Thomas Babington Macaulay & Moses Grant Daniell

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**THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY & MOSES GRANT DANIELL**

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*W. Mansley*

From a photograph



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LAYS OF ANCIENT ROME

EDITED  
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES  
BY  
MOSES GRANT DANIELL



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## INTRODUCTION.

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THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, son of Zachary Macaulay, an eminent philanthropist, was born Oct. 25, 1800, at Rothley Temple, Leicestershire, England. He was graduated at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1822, and in 1824 was elected a Fellow of Trinity, remaining there till 1825. He entered Parliament in 1830. In 1834 he was made a member of the Supreme Council of India, and soon proceeded to Calcutta, where he remained till 1838. He was again elected to Parliament in 1839, appointed War-secretary in 1840, and Paymaster-general in 1846. In 1847 he was defeated in his canvass for Parliament, but was re-elected in 1852. In 1857 he was raised to the peerage of Great Britain under the title of Baron Macaulay of Rothley. He died Dec. 28, 1859, at his residence, Holly Lodge, London, and was buried in Westminster Abbey in the "Poets' Corner."

In his earliest childhood Macaulay gave evidence of the remarkable intellectual gifts with which nature had endowed him, and of his decided bent towards literary pursuits. Before he was eight years old he had written a *Compendium of Universal History* and a romance entitled *The Battle of Cheviot*. A little later he composed poems of great length. These juvenile productions are said to have been creditable performances for one of his age, or, as Hannah More said of some hymns that he had composed, "quite extraordinary for such a baby." They are mentioned here only to show how early his mental activity began to display itself.



At college he acquired a brilliant reputation as a scholar and debater, though he did not reach the highest college rank on account of his dislike of mathematical studies. He twice received the Chancellor's medal for excellence in English verse.

At the age of twenty-six he was admitted to the bar; but after a year or two he found that the law was not his vocation, and soon abandoned it altogether. Meanwhile fame was coming to him from other directions. In 1825 his first contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*, the essay on Milton, appeared, and it at once became evident that a new star had risen on the literary horizon. He continued to write for the *Review* for nearly twenty years, during which time appeared the celebrated essays on Lord Bacon, Bunyan, Lord Clive, Warren Hastings, and others, all marked by the same profundity of learning, the same wealth and aptness of illustration, the same brilliancy of fancy, the same critical acumen, and the same felicities of style that characterized his first effort.

In his political career Macaulay was an ardent Whig; but he never sacrificed his convictions of what was right to mere expediency or to popular clamor. It was his independence that cost him his seat in Parliament in 1847. In Parliament he was a skilful and ready debater, and his reputation as an exceptionally brilliant orator always attracted crowds of eager listeners whenever it was known that he was to speak.

His services in India were of great value to the government and to the people of that country. He drafted a penal code, which, after much discussion and revision, became the code under which criminal law is now administered throughout the Indian empire. He also set on foot a system of national education, which has since spread over the whole of India.

The *History of England* was to be the crowning work of

Macaulay's life, and that upon which his fame should chiefly rest. He gradually gave up all thought of further political preferment, devoting the last years of his life almost exclusively to the immense labor involved in the prosecution of this work. Unfortunately, he lived to complete only five volumes. When the first two volumes were issued, in 1848, they were received with remarkable enthusiasm on both sides of the Atlantic. In fact, no similar work had ever met with such a reception.

In the height of his fame as a statesman, orator, and writer, Macaulay achieved also great social distinction, for to his other accomplishments he added that of being a very entertaining converser and story-teller. "His family breakfast table was covered with cards of invitation to dinner from every quarter of London."

He was altogether charming in his domestic relations. He was never married, but seemed to live for his sister Hannah, to whom he was devotedly attached, and whose children he treated as his own.

No account of Macaulay, however brief, is complete without mention of his prodigious memory. He seemed to remember without effort everything that he had ever read or heard, even to the minutest details. "At one period of his life he was known to say that, if by some miracle of vandalism all copies of *Paradise Lost* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* were destroyed off the face of the earth, he would undertake to reproduce them both from recollection whenever a revival of learning came."<sup>1</sup> Even towards the end of his life he would sometimes devote his leisure hours to testing his memory. "I walked in the portico," he writes in October, 1857, "and learned by heart the noble Fourth Act of the *Merchant of Venice*. There are four hundred lines, of which I knew a hundred and fifty. I made myself perfect master

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. i, p. 52.

of the whole, the prose letter included, in two hours." <sup>1</sup> On one occasion, in answer to a friendly challenge to a feat of memory, he drew off at once a full list of the Senior Wranglers at Cambridge, with their dates and colleges, for the hundred years during which the names of Senior Wranglers had been recorded in the University Calendar.

Through all his varied career he never ceased to keep up his acquaintance with classic literature. Even in the midst of the turmoil of political life and the incessant demands of official position, he found time to read again and again the works that most men close forever when they leave college.

In his correspondence and in his journal he makes frequent reference to this habit, as, for example: "Calcutta, Dec. 30, 1835. . . . During the last thirteen months I have read Æschylus twice; Sophocles twice; Euripides once; Pindar twice; Callimachus; Apollonius Rhodius; 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 Athenæus; Plautus twice; Terence twice; Lucretius twice; Catullus; Tibullus; Propertius; Lucan; Statius; Silius Italicus; Livy; Velleius Paternulus; Sallust; Caesar; and, lastly, Cicero."<sup>2</sup>

Macaulay's purpose in writing the *Lays* he has fully explained in the preface. A few additional statements and remarks about them are worth quoting. Writing to the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* in July, 1842, he says: "You are acquainted, no doubt, with Perizonius's theory about the early Roman history, — a theory which Niebuhr revived, and which Arnold <sup>3</sup> has adopted as fully established. I have myself not the smallest doubt of its truth. It is that the

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. i, p. 448.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Thomas Arnold of Rugby.