

Passage 2d: Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Hallam's History*

History, at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy. It impresses general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents. But, in fact, the two hostile elements of which it consists have never been known to form a perfect amalgamation; and at length, in our own time, they have been completely and professedly separated. Good histories, in the proper sense of the word, we have not. But we have good historical romances, and good historical essays. The imagination and the reason, if we may use a legal metaphor, have made partition of a province of literature of which they were formerly seized per my et per tout; and now they hold their respective portions in severalty, instead of holding the whole in common.

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 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 on judgment of events and men, to trace the connection of cause and effects, and to draw from the occurrences of former time general lessons of moral and political wisdom, has become the business of a distinct class of writers.

Of the two kinds of composition into which history has been thus divided, the one may be compared to a map, the other to a painted landscape. The picture, though it places the country before us, does not enable us to ascertain with accuracy the dimensions, the distances, and the angles. The map is not a work of imitative art. It presents no scene to the imagination; but it gives us exact information as to the bearings of the various points, and is a more useful companion to the traveller or the general than the painted landscape could be, though it were the grandest that ever Rosa peopled with outlaws, or the sweetest over which Claude ever poured the mellow effulgence of a setting sun.

Passage 2e: George Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*

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 unmistakable 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.