
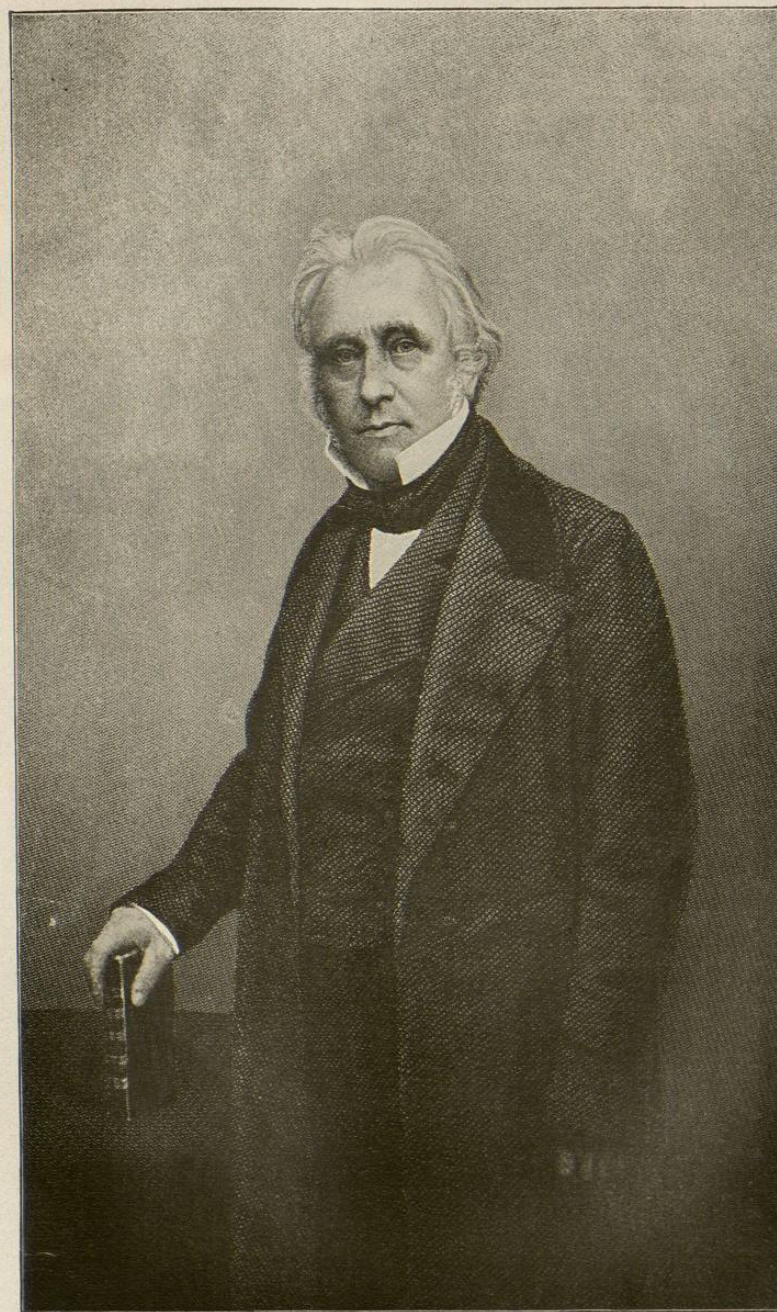


LORD MACAULAY

HOMAS BABINGTON, BARON MACAULAY, eminent English historian, essayist, poet, and statesman, was born at Rothley Temple, Leicestershire, Oct. 25, 1800, and died at Kensington, London, Dec. 28, 1859. The son of Zachary Macaulay, who at one time was governor of Sierra Leone, he was educated at Clapham, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he won a scholarship and the chancellor's medal for English verse, and graduated in 1822, two years later being elected a Fellow of his college. At college he made a reputation for himself as a great debater and public speaker, as well as a contributor to Knight's "Quarterly Magazine." In 1825, his notable essay on Milton appeared in the "Edinburgh Review," and in the following year he was called to the Bar. Despite his bent toward literature and his gifts as a brilliant prose writer, Macaulay entered Parliament, where his powers of oratory manifested themselves in speeches on Reform and other liberal measures, including one in which he took part for removing the civil disabilities of the Jews. In 1834, he proceeded to India as legal adviser to the Supreme Council at Calcutta, where he remained for four years, meanwhile compiling a new penal code for India, and writing his essays on Bacon and on Sir James Mackintosh. To his residence in India, and the impress it made upon the writer's mind, we also owe the two brilliant essays on Lord Clive and on Warren Hastings. On his return, he reëntered Parliament as member for Edinburgh, and became Secretary of War and Paymaster-General, with a seat in the Cabinet. In 1842, appeared his dashing "Lays of Ancient Rome," with additional essays, and later on he published his popular "History of England from the Accession of James II." Subsequent volumes of this entertaining work were issued in 1855-59, and were received with enthusiasm by readers. The narrative, by its vigor, animation, and felicity of style, justified the unprecedented sale the history met with. In 1857, its brilliant author was made a Peer. As an orator, Macaulay manifests many of the characteristics of his work as an historian and essayist—his enthusiasm, animation, and thoroughly English spirit, his phenomenal command of illustration, and a staccato style, noted in the sharp, short form of the sentence, made pleasing and interesting by the knack of balanced antitheses. In his famous history, we have the firm hand of the robust rhetorician, but never the soft touch of the idealist or poet. Macaulay had no acute sensibilities; and hence in his prose there is little of humor and less of pathos. Yet every page is instinct with life, bright with color, and affluent of illustration. From every nook of literature he brings something to enrich his narrative and ornament his work.

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THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

SPEECH ON PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH 2, 1831

IT IS a circumstance, sir, of happy augury for the motion before the House, that almost all those who have opposed it have declared themselves hostile on principle to parliamentary reform. Two members, I think, have confessed that, though they disapprove of the plan now submitted to us, they are forced to admit the necessity of a change in the representative system. Yet even those gentlemen have used, as far as I have observed, no arguments which would not apply as strongly to the most moderate change as to that which has been proposed by his Majesty's government. I say, sir, that I consider this as a circumstance of happy augury. For what I feared was not the opposition of those who are averse to all reform, but the disunion of reformers. I knew that, during three months, every reformer had been employed in conjecturing what the plan of the government would be. I knew that every reformer had imagined in his own mind a scheme differing doubtless in some points from that which my noble friend, the paymaster of the forces, has developed. I felt, therefore, great apprehension that one person would be dissatisfied with one part of the bill, that another person would be dissatisfied with another part, and that thus our whole strength would be wasted in internal dissensions. That apprehension is now at an end. I have seen with delight the perfect concord which prevails among all who deserve the name of reformers in this House; and I trust that I may consider it as an omen of the concord which will prevail among reformers

throughout the country. I will not, sir, at present express any opinion as to the details of the bill; but, having during the last twenty-four hours given the most diligent consideration to its general principles, I have no hesitation in pronouncing it a wise, noble, and comprehensive measure, skilfully framed for the healing of great distempers, for the securing at once of the public liberties and of the public repose, and for the reconciling and knitting together of all the orders of the state.

The honorable baronet who has just sat down¹ has told us that the ministers have attempted to unite two inconsistent principles in one abortive measure. Those were his very words. He thinks, if I understand him rightly, that we ought either to leave the representative system such as it is, or to make it perfectly symmetrical. I think, sir, that the ministers would have acted unwisely if they had taken either course. Their principle is plain, rational, and consistent. It is this, to admit the middle class to a large and direct share in the representation, without any violent shock to the institutions of our country. I understand those cheers; but surely the gentlemen who utter them will allow that the change which will be made in our institutions by this bill is far less violent than that which, according to the honorable baronet, ought to be made if we make any reform at all. I praise the ministers for not attempting at the present time to make the representation uniform. I praise them for not effacing the old distinction between the towns and the counties, and for not assigning members to districts, according to the American practice, by the rule of three. The government has, in my opinion, done all that was necessary for the removing of a great practical evil, and no more than was necessary.

I consider this, sir, as a practical question. I rest my opin-

¹Sir John Walsh.

ion on no general theory of government. I distrust all general theories of government. I will not positively say that there is any form of polity which may not, in some conceivable circumstances, be the best possible. I believe that there are societies in which every man may safely be admitted to vote. Gentlemen may cheer, but such is my opinion. I say, sir, that there are countries in which the condition of the laboring classes is such that they may safely be intrusted with the right of electing members of the legislature. If the laborers of England were in that state in which I, from my soul, wish to see them, if employment were always plentiful, wages always high, food always cheap, if a large family were considered not as an encumbrance but as a blessing, the principal objections to universal suffrage would, I think, be removed. Universal suffrage exists in the United States without producing any very frightful consequences; and I do not believe that the people of those States, or of any part of the world, are in any good quality naturally superior to our own countrymen. But, unhappily, the laboring classes in England, and in all old countries, are occasionally in a state of great distress. Some of the causes of this distress are, I fear, beyond the control of the government. We know what effect distress produces, even on people more intelligent than the great body of the laboring classes can possibly be. We know that it makes even wise men irritable, unreasonable, credulous, eager for immediate relief, heedless of remote consequences. There is no quackery in medicine, religion, or politics which may not impose even on a powerful mind, when that mind has been disordered by pain or fear. It is, therefore, no reflection on the poorer class of Englishmen, who are not, and who cannot in the nature of things, be highly educated, to say that distress produces on them its natural effects, those effects which

it would produce on the Americans, or on any other people, that it blinds their judgment, that it inflames their passions, that it makes them prone to believe those who flatter them and to distrust those who would serve them. For the sake, therefore, of the whole society, for the sake of the laboring classes themselves, I hold it to be clearly expedient that, in a country like this, the right of suffrage should depend on a pecuniary qualification.

But, sir, every argument which would induce me to oppose universal suffrage induces me to support the plan which is now before us. I am opposed to universal suffrage because I think that it would produce a destructive revolution. I support this plan because I am sure that it is our best security against a revolution. The noble paymaster of the forces hinted, delicately indeed and remotely, at this subject. He spoke of the danger of disappointing the expectations of the nation; and for this he was charged with threatening the House. Sir, in the year 1817, the late Lord Londonderry proposed a suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. On that occasion he told the House that, unless the measures which he recommended were adopted, the public peace could not be preserved. Was he accused of threatening the House? Again, in the year 1819, he proposed the laws known by the name of the Six Acts. He then told the House that unless the executive power were reinforced all the institutions of the country would be overturned by popular violence. Was he then accused of threatening the House? Will any gentleman say that it is parliamentary and decorous to urge the danger arising from popular discontent as an argument for severity; but that it is unparliamentary and indecorous to urge that same danger as an argument for conciliation? I, sir, do entertain great apprehension for the fate of my country. I do in my conscience believe that, un-

less the plan proposed, or some similar plan, be speedily adopted, great and terrible calamities will befall us. Entertaining this opinion, I think myself bound to state it, not as a threat, but as a reason. I support this bill because it will improve our institutions; but I support it also because it tends to preserve them. That we may exclude those whom it is necessary to exclude, we must admit those whom it may be safe to admit. At present we oppose the schemes of revolutionists with only one half, with only one quarter of our proper force. We say, and we say justly, that it is not by mere numbers, but by property and intelligence, that the nation ought to be governed. Yet, saying this, we exclude from all share in the government great masses of property and intelligence, great numbers of those who are most interested in preserving tranquillity, and who know best how to preserve it. We do more. We drive over to the side of revolution those whom we shut out from power. Is this a time when the cause of law and order can spare one of its natural allies?

My noble friend, the Paymaster of the Forces, happily described the effect which some parts of our representative system would produce on the mind of a foreigner who had heard much of our freedom and greatness. If, sir, I wished to make such a foreigner clearly understand what I consider as the great defects of our system, I would conduct him through that immense city which lies to the north of Great Russell Street and Oxford Street, a city superior in size and in population to the capitals of many mighty kingdoms; and probably superior in opulence, intelligence, and general respectability to any city in the world. I would conduct him through that interminable succession of streets and squares, all consisting of well-built and well-furnished houses. I would make him ob-

serve the brilliancy of the shops and the crowd of well-appointed equipages. I would show him that magnificent circle of palaces which surround the Regent's Park. I would tell him that the rental of this district was far greater than that of the whole kingdom of Scotland at the time of the union. And then I would tell him that this was an unrepresented district. It is needless to give any more instances. It is needless to speak of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, with no representation, or of Edinburgh and Glasgow with a mock representation. If a property tax were now imposed on the principle that no person who had less than a hundred and fifty pounds a year should contribute, I should not be surprised to find that one half in number and value of the contributors had no votes at all; and it would, beyond all doubt, be found that one fiftieth part in number and value of the contributors had a larger share of the representation than the other forty-nine fiftieths. This is not government by property. It is government by certain detached portions and fragments of property, selected from the rest, and preferred to the rest, on no rational principle whatever.

To say that such a system is ancient is no defence. My honorable friend the member for the University of Oxford¹ challenges us to show that the constitution was ever better than it is. Sir, we are legislators, not antiquaries. The question for us is, not whether the constitution was better formerly, but whether we can make it better now. In fact, however, the system was not in ancient times by any means so absurd as it is in our age. One noble lord² has to-night told us that the town of Aldborough, which he represents, was not larger in the time of Edward I than it is at present.

¹ Sir Robert Harry Inglis.

² Lord Stormont.

The line of its walls, he assures us, may still be traced. It is now built up to that line. He argues, therefore, that as the founders of our representative institutions gave members to Aldborough when it was as small as it now is, those who would disfranchise it on account of its smallness have no right to say that they are recurring to the original principle of our representative institutions. But does the noble lord remember the change which has taken place in the country during the last five centuries? Does he remember how much England has grown in population while Aldborough has been standing still? Does he consider that in the time of Edward I the kingdom did not contain two millions of inhabitants? It now contains nearly fourteen millions. A hamlet of the present day would have been a town of some importance in the time of our early Parliaments. Aldborough may be absolutely as considerable a place as ever. But compared with the kingdom, it is much less considerable, by the noble lord's own showing, than when it first elected burgesses. My honorable friend the member for the University of Oxford has collected numerous instances of the tyranny which the kings and nobles anciently exercised, both over this House and over the electors. It is not strange that, in times when nothing was held sacred, the rights of the people, and of the representatives of the people, should not have been held sacred. The proceedings which my honorable friend has mentioned no more prove that by the ancient constitution of the realm this House ought to be a tool of the king and of the aristocracy than the benevolences and the ship-money prove their own legality, or than those unjustifiable arrests which took place long after the ratification of the great charter and even after the Petition of Right prove that the subject was not anciently entitled to his personal liberty. We talk of the wisdom of our ancestors;

and in one respect at least they were wiser than we. They legislated for their own times. They looked at the England which was before them. They did not think it necessary to give twice as many members to York as they gave to London, because York had been the capital of Britain in the time of Constantius Chlorus; and they would have been amazed indeed if they had foreseen that a city of more than a hundred thousand inhabitants would be left without representatives in the nineteenth century, merely because it stood on ground which in the thirteenth century had been occupied by a few huts. They framed a representative system which, though not without defects and irregularities, was well adapted to the state of England in their time. But a great revolution took place. The character of the old corporations changed. New forms of property came into existence. New portions of society rose into importance. There were in our rural districts rich cultivators who were not freeholders. There were in our capital rich traders who were not livery-men. Towns shrank into villages. Villages swelled into cities larger than the London of the Plantagenets. Unhappily while the natural growth of society went on, the artificial polity continued unchanged. The ancient form of the representation remained; and precisely because the form remained, the spirit departed. Then came that pressure almost to bursting, the new wine in the old bottles, the new society under the old institutions. It is now time for us to pay a decent, a rational, a manly reverence to our ancestors, not by superstitiously adhering to what they, in other circumstances, did, **but** by doing what they, in our circumstances, would have **done**. All history is full of revolutions, produced by causes similar to **those** which are now operating in England. A portion of the community which had been of no account expands and becomes strong. It de-

mands a place in the system suited, not to its former weakness, but to its present power. If this be granted, all is well. If this is refused, then comes the struggle between the young energy of one class and the ancient privileges of another. Such was the struggle between the plebeians and the patricians of Rome. Such was the struggle of the Italian allies for admission to the full rights of Roman citizens. Such was the struggle of our North American colonies against the mother country. Such was the struggle which the Third Estate of France maintained against the aristocracy of birth. Such was the struggle which the Roman Catholics of Ireland maintained against the aristocracy of creed. Such is the struggle which the free people of color in Jamaica are now maintaining against the aristocracy of skin. Such, finally, is the struggle which the middle classes in England are maintaining against an aristocracy of mere locality, against an aristocracy the principle of which is to invest a hundred drunken potwallopers in one place, or the owner of a ruined hovel in another, with powers which are withheld from cities renowned to the farthest ends of the earth for the marvels of their wealth and of their industry.

But these great cities, says my honorable friend the member for the University of Oxford, are virtually, though not directly, represented. Are not the wishes of Manchester, he asks, as much consulted as those of any town which sends members to Parliament? Now, sir, I do not understand how a power which is salutary when exercised virtually can be noxious when exercised directly. If the wishes of Manchester have as much weight with us as they would have under a system which should give representatives to Manchester, how can there be any danger in giving representatives to Manchester? A virtual representative is, I presume, a man who acts as a