CARLYLE
RUSKIN
THACKERAY.
DICKENS.

to satirize it than to set forth its agreeableness. Yet, after all, it is "the great world" which he describes, that world upon which the broadening and refining processes of a high civilization have done their utmost, and which, consequently, must possess an intellectual interest superior to any thing in the life of London thieves, traveling showmen, and coachees. Thackeray is the equal of Swift as a satirist, of Dickens as a humorist, and of Scott as a novelist. The one element lacking in him—and which Scott had in a high degree—is the poetic imagination. "I have no brains above my eyes" he said ; "I describe what I see." Hence there is wanting in his creations that final charm which Shakspere's have. For what the eyes see is not all.

The great woman who wrote under the pen-name of George Eliot was a humorist, too. She had a rich, deep humor of her own, and a wit that crystallized into sayings which are not epigrams only because their wisdom strikes more than their smartness. But humor was not, as with Thackeray and Dickens, her point of view. A country girl, the daughter of a land agent and surveyor at Nuneaton, in Warwickshire, her early letters and journals exhibit a Calvinistic gravity and moral severity. Later, when her truth to her convictions led her to renounce the Christian belief, she carried into positivism the same religious earnestness, and wrote the one English hymn of the religion of humanity:

> O, let me join the choir invisible, etc.

Her first published work was a translation of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, 1846. In 1851 she went to London and became one of the editors of the Radical organ, the *Westminster Review*. Here she formed a connection—a marriage in all but the name—with George Henry Lewes, who was, like herself, a freethinker, and who published, among other things, a *Biographical History of Philosophy*. Lewes had also written fiction, and it was at his suggestion that his wife undertook story writing. Her *Scenes of Clerical Life* were contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* for 1857, and published in book form in the following year. *Adam Bede* followed in 1859, the *Mill on the Floss* in 1860, *Silas Marner* in 1861, *Romola* in 1863, *Felix Holt* in 1866, and *Middlemarch* in 1872. All of these, except *Romola*, are tales of provincial and largely of domestic life in the midland counties. *Romola* is an historical novel, the scene of which is Florence in the 15th century; the Florence of Macchiavelli and of Savonarola.

George Eliot's method was very different from that of Thackeray or Dickens. She did not crowd her canvas with the swarming life of cities. Her figures are comparatively few, and they are selected from the middle-class families of rural parishes or small towns, amid that atmosphere of "fine old leisure;" whose disappearance she lamented. Her drama is a still-life drama, intensely and profoundly inward. Character is the stuff that she works in, and she deals with it more subtly than Thackeray. With him the tragedy is produced by the pressure of society and its false standards upon the individual; with her, by the malign influence of individuals upon one another. She watches "the stealthy convergence of human fates," the intersection at various angles of the planes of character, the power that the lower nature has to thwart, stupefy, or corrupt the higher, which has become entangled with it in the mesh of destiny. At the bottom of every one of her stories there is a problem of the conscience or the intellect. In this respect she resembles Hawthorne, though she is not, like him, a romancer, but a realist.

There is a melancholy philosophy in her books, most of which are tales of failure or frustration. The *Mill on the Floss* contains a large element of autobiography, and its heroine, Maggie Tulliver, is, perhaps, her idealized self. Her aspirations after a fuller and nobler existence are condemned to struggle against the resistance of a narrow, provincial environment, and the pressure of untoward fates. She is

tempted to seek an escape even through a desperate throwing off of moral obligations, and is driven back to her duty only to die by a sudden stroke of destiny. "Life is a bad business," wrote George Eliot, in a letter to a friend, "and we must make the most of it." *Adam Bede* is, in construction, the most perfect of her novels, and *Silas Marner* of her shorter stories. Her analytic habit gained more and more upon her as she wrote. *Middlemarch*, in some respects her greatest book, lacks the unity of her earlier novels, and the story tends to become subordinate to the working out of character studies and social problems. The philosophic speculations which she shared with her husband were seemingly unfavorable to her artistic growth, a circumstance which becomes apparent in her last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, 1877. Finally in the *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, 1879, she abandoned narrative altogether, and recurred to that type of "character" books which we have met as a flourishing department of literature in the 17th century, represented by such works as Earle's *Microcosmographie* and Fuller's *Holy and Profane State*. The moral of George Eliot's writings is not obtruded. She never made the artistic mistake of writing a novel of purpose, or what the Germans call a *tendenz-roman;* as Dickens did, for example, when he attacked imprisonment for debt, in *Pickwick;* the poor laws, in *Oliver Twist;* the Court of Chancery, in *Bleak House;* and the Circumlocution office, in *Little Dorrit.*

Next to the novel, the essay has been the most overflowing literary form used by the writers of this generation—a form characteristic, it may be, of an age which "lectures, not creates." It is not the essay of Bacon, nor yet of Addison, nor of Lamb, but attempts a complete treatment. Indeed, many longish books, like Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship* and Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, are, in spirit, rather literary essays than formal treatises. The most popular essayist and historian of his time was Thomas Babington Macaulay

(1800–1859), an active and versatile man, who won splendid success in many fields of labor. He was prominent in public life as one of the leading orators and writers of the Whig party. He sat many times in the House of Commons, as member for Calne, for Leeds, and for Edinburgh, and took a distinguished part in the debates on the Reform bill of 1832. He held office in several Whig governments, and during his four years' service in British India, as member of the Supreme Council of Calcutta, he did valuable work in promoting education in that province, and in codifying the Indian penal law. After his return to England, and especially after the publication of his *History of England from The Accession of James II.*, honors and appointments of all kinds were showered upon him. In 1857 he was raised to the peerage as Baron Macaulay of Rothley.

Macaulay's equipment, as a writer on historical and biographical subjects, was, in some points, unique. His reading was prodigious, and his memory so tenacious that it was said, with but little exaggeration, that he never forgot any thing that he had read. He could repeat the whole of *Paradise Lost* by heart, and thought it probable that he could rewrite *Sir Charles Grandison* from memory. In his books, in his speeches in the House of Commons, and in private conversation—for he was an eager and fluent talker, running on often for hours at a stretch—he was never at a loss to fortify and illustrate his positions by citation after citation of dates, names, facts of all kinds, and passages quoted *verbatim* from his multifarious reading. The first of Macaulay's writings to attract general notice was his article on *Milton*, printed in the August number of the *Edinburgh Review* for 1825. The editor, Lord Jeffrey, in acknowledging the receipt of the manuscript, wrote to his new contributor, "The more I think, the less I can conceive where you picked up that style." That celebrated style—about which so much has since been written—was an index to the mental character of its owner.

Macaulay was of a confident, sanguine, impetuous nature. He had great common sense, and he saw what he saw quickly and clearly, but he did not see very far below the surface. He wrote with the conviction of an advocate, and the easy omniscience of a man whose learning is really nothing more than "general information" raised to a very high power, rather than with the subtle penetration of an original or truly philosophic intellect, like Coleridge's or De Quincey's. He always had at hand explanations of events or of characters which were admirably easy and simple—too simple, indeed, for the complicated phenomena which they professed to explain. His style was clear, animated, showy, and even its faults were of an exciting kind. It was his habit to give piquancy to his writing by putting things concretely. Thus, instead of saying, in general terms—as Hume or Gibbon might have done—that the Normans and Saxons began to mingle about 1200, he says: "The great-grandsons of those who had fought under William and the great grandsons of those who had fought under Harold began to draw near to each other." Macaulay was a great scene painter, who neglected delicate truths of detail for exaggerated distemper effects. He used the rhetorical machinery of climax and hyperbole for all that it was worth, and he "made points"—as in his essay on *Bacon*—by creating antithesis. In his *History of England* he inaugurated the picturesque method of historical writing. The book was as fascinating as any novel. Macaulay, like Scott, had the historic imagination, though his method of turning history into romance was very different from Scott's. Among his essays the best are those which, like the ones on *Lord Clive*, *Warren Hastings*, and *Frederick the Great*, deal with historical subjects; or those which deal with literary subjects under their public historic relations, such as the essays on *Addison*, *Bunyan*, and *The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration*. "I have never written a page of criticism on poetry, or the fine arts," wrote

Macaulay, "which I would not burn if I had the power." Nevertheless his own *Lays of Ancient Rome*, 1842, are good, stirring verse of the emphatic and declamatory kind, though their quality may be rather rhetorical than poetic.

Our critical time has not forborne to criticize itself, and perhaps the writer who impressed himself most strongly upon his generation was the one who railed most desperately against the "spirit of the age." Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) was occupied between 1822 and 1830 chiefly in imparting to the British public a knowledge of German literature. He published, among other things, a *Life of Schiller*, a translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, and two volumes of translations from the German romancers—Tieck, Hoffmann, Richter, and Fouqué—and contributed to the *Edinburgh* and *Foreign Review* articles on Goethe, Werner, Novalis, Richter, German playwrights, the *Nibelungen Lied*, etc. His own diction became more and more tinctured with Germanisms. There was something Gothic in his taste, which was attracted by the lawless, the grotesque, and the whimsical in the writings of Jean Paul Richter. His favorite among English humorists was Sterne, who has a share of these same qualities. He spoke disparagingly of "the sensuous literature of the Greeks," and preferred the Norse to the Hellenic mythology. Even in his admirable critical essays on Burns, on Richter, on Scott, Diderot, and Voltaire, which are free from his later mannerism—written in English, and not in Carlylese—his sense of spirit is always more lively than his sense of form. He finally became so impatient of art as to maintain—half-seriously—the paradox that Shakspere would have done better to write in prose. In three of these early essays—on the *Signs of the Times*, 1829; on *History*, 1830, and on *Characteristics*, 1831—are to be found the germs of all his later writings. The first of these was an arraignment of the mechanical spirit of the age. In every province of thought he discovered too great a reliance upon systems, institutions, machinery, instead of upon men. Thus, in religion, we have Bible societies, "machines for converting the heathen." "In defect of Raphaels and Angelos and Mozarts, we have royal academies of painting, sculpture, music." In like manner, he complains, government is a machine. "Its duties and faults are not those of a father, but of an active parish-constable." Against the "police theory," as distinguished from the "paternal" theory, of government, Carlyle protested with ever shriller iteration. In *Chartism*, 1839, *Past and Present*, 1843, and *Latter-day Pamphlets*, 1850, he denounced this *laissez faire* idea. The business of government, he repeated, is to govern; but this view makes it its business to refrain from governing. He fought most fiercely against the conclusions of political economy, "the dismal science" which, he said, affirmed that men were guided exclusively by their stomachs. He protested, too, against the Utilitarians, followers of Bentham and Mill, with their "greatest happiness principle," which reduced virtue to a profit-and-loss account. Carlyle took issue with modern liberalism; he ridiculed the self-gratulation of the time, all the talk about progress of the species, unexampled prosperity, etc. But he was reactionary without being conservative. He had studied the French Revolution, and he saw the fateful, irresistible approach of democracy. He had no faith in government "by counting noses," and he hated talking Parliaments; but neither did he put trust in an aristocracy that spent its time in "preserving the game." What he wanted was a great individual ruler; a real king or hero; and this doctrine he set forth afterward most fully in *Hero Worship*, 1841, and illustrated in his lives of representative heroes, such as his *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 1845, and his great *History of Frederick the Great*, 1858–1865. Cromwell and Frederick were well enough; but as Carlyle grew older his admiration for mere force grew, and his latest hero was none other than that infamous Dr. Francia, the South American dictator, whose career of bloody and crafty crime horrified the civilized world.

The essay on *History* was a protest against the scientific view of history which attempts to explain away and account for the wonderful. "Wonder," he wrote in *Sartor Resartus*, "is the basis of all worship." He defined history as "the essence of innumerable biographies." "Mr. Carlyle," said the Italian patriot, Mazzini, "comprehends only the individual. The nationality of Italy is, in his eyes, the glory of having produced Dante and Christopher Columbus." This trait comes out in his greatest book, *The French Revolution*, 1837, which is a mighty tragedy enacted by a few leading characters—Mirabeau, Danton, Napoleon. He loved to emphasize the superiority of history over fiction as dramatic material. The third of the three essays mentioned was a Jeremiad on the morbid self-consciousness of the age, which shows itself, in religion and philosophy, as skepticism and introspective metaphysics ; and in literature, as sentimentalism, and "view-hunting."

But Carlyle's epoch-making book was *Sartor Resartus* (The Tailor Retailored), published in *Fraser's Magazine* for 1833–1834, and first reprinted in book form in America. This was a satire upon shams, conventions, the disguises which overlie the most spiritual realities of the soul. It purported to be the life and "clothes-philosophy" of a certain Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Professor *der Allerlei Wissenschaft*—of things in general—in the University of Weissnichtwo. "Society," said Carlyle, "is founded upon cloth," following the suggestions of Lear's speech to the naked bedlam beggar : "Thou art the thing itself : unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art ;" and borrowing also, perhaps, an ironical hint from a paragraph in Swift's *Tale of a Tub :* "A sect was established who held the universe to be a large suit of