

MACAULAY'S ESSAYS.

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MACAULAY, the greatest writer, perhaps, of the English nation, made his most brilliant contribution to literature in a somewhat undignified form. The treasures of his great memory, the enthusiasm of his exalted mind, the descriptive powers of his vivid pen, were concentrated on short and unconnected articles, written on the impulse of transient events, and published in a periodical of literary criticism. Those musical sentences which dethroned from their place of supremacy in letters the refined simplicity of Addison, and the sonorous eloquence of Gibbon, those immortal expositions which bring before our minds in one view the whole nature and history of the Church of Rome in Europe, the whole theory of the development of popular liberty, first in Britain and then on the Continent, the whole contrast between the high-flying 'philosophy' of the ancients and the modest philosophy of Bacon—were all brought into existence to stand side by side with ordinary critical matter in the columns of the *Edinburgh Review*. It is in the essays of Macaulay that we have the best examples known to us of the combination of beauty with force; it is to the essays of Macaulay that we go to study depth of thought united with elegance of arrangement; it is in the essays of Macaulay, if anywhere, that we would expect lofty subjects with lofty surroundings; and yet these very essays were written to

announce the appearance of obscure biographies and new editions of classical works. The articles are generally suggested by obscure publications, and are often prefaced by petty denunciations of the authors. All the fine reasoning in the essay on Milton owes its existence to a musty pamphlet of the great poet, discovered by a Mr. Lemon and edited by a Mr. Sumner. All those paragraphs in the essay on Hastings, by virtue of which we fancy ourselves sitting in Westminster Hall, and think we hear the voice of Sheridan, are mingled in our minds with the imperfections of the Rev. Mr. Gleig, and his incapacity as a biographer. In the essay on Croker's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, our attention is directed to Mr. Croker's bad English, and even to his bad type. The essay on Robert Montgomery, that nipping of a poet in the bud, is the strength of a master in literature devoted to the immortalizing of a fool.

The peculiar style of Macaulay has, ever since the appearance of his first writings, been the study and admiration of all readers. The most common description of it is to say that the sentences are short, and that general statements are habitually followed by particular statements illustrating them. But it may be doubted whether the most fundamental peculiarity of his diction is the brevity of the sentences. The sentences are not short. It is true that sentences