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978-0-521-11800-2 - The Travel Diaries of Thomas Robert Malthus

Edited By Patricia James

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The Rev. Professor Thomas Robert Malthus, from an engraving, after the portrait by Linnell, 1833.

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PATRICIA JAMES

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Foreword

The place of Malthus in the history of economic thought—his position as the author of the famous *Essay on the Principle of Population*, as one of the originators of the classical theory of rent, as a participant with Ricardo in the most celebrated epistolary dialogue in the literature of the subject—is such that anything that throws light on his life or the genesis of his ideas is valuable. Together with Adam Smith, Ricardo, John Stuart Mill and Marshall, he is one of the select company of nineteenth-century British economists of which even the least fragment of literary remains is to be welcomed.

The main diaries here reproduced have an importance transcending the interest of mere association, fascinating though that may be: they are the authentic record of a stage in the evolution of Malthus's thought on population which is of critical significance. The contrast between the first and second editions of the *Essay*, the first a brilliant *a priori* polemic, the second a weighty empirical treatise, has long been recognised. Indeed, it was pointed out by Malthus himself. In the preface to the second edition he relates how, in the course of the reflections on the application of the ideas of the first edition, he was led to 'an historical examination of the effects of the principle of population on the past and present state of society', so 'that by illustrating the subject more generally and drawing those inferences from it, in application to the actual state of things which experience seemed to warrant, I might give it a more practical and permanent interest.' In the first edition he had stated more or less dogmatically that population was confined within the limits of subsistence by checks all of which involved either misery or vice. In the second edition he inquired what these checks actually were and was disposed to admit the possibility of checks which were neither miserable nor vicious. This involved detailed inquiries and travel in a number of countries.

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The result, as he says in the preface, ‘was in effect a new work’ which, in Marshall’s words, was based on so wide and careful a statement of facts as to claim for the author ‘a place among the founders of historical economics’.

These records of his travels in Scandinavia show the investigation actually in progress. Some at least of the events of the journey are related in the *Travels in Various Countries of Europe* by one of Malthus’s companions, Dr Edward Clarke, to whom he had lent his manuscript diaries. But here we have their original impact entered up presumably more or less as they occurred. Mrs James’s Appendix 1 sets out the passages, in the definitive edition, which resulted from these observations. In their context in the daily records, we can see how they arose in the actual process of travel, how for instance, the information regarding the effects of military service in Norway on what Malthus calls ‘popn’ first emerged after a meal in a bedroom which started badly with ‘dried salmon undress’d & spinage’, a circumstance leading almost to ‘despair’, but which improved considerably when ‘a fine roasted turkey made its appearance which set our minds & our bodies at rest’. We become privy to some of the difficulties of research in the report of the awkward interview with the unfortunate Professor Thaarup who, when they made him ‘understand that we had heard of his fame as a Statistic writer, & had purchased his work in Copenhagen even tho we did not understand Danish or German,—& that we wished to beg the favour of an answer to a few questions on the subject of his enquiries, he was so much alarmed, & seemed to feel so awkward that we were rather in pain for him’—an interview, however, which was eventually cheered by ‘plenty of strawberries and cream’ which ‘afforded us great relief’.

But it is not only for the occasional entries on ‘popn’ questions that the diaries are notable. Both in the main Scandinavian narrative and in the supplementary records of other excursions here reproduced, they afford valuable evidence of general temper of the author’s mind in its focus on the economic aspect of things—his patient empiricism, his concern with the mundane details of institutions and customary behaviour, his persistent interest in the costs and amenities of living in different environments. From the arrival at Hamburg, where he learned that ‘the war, by raising prices of all articles in so

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extraordinary a manner, had greatly oppressed those who had fixed incomes' to the last few entries of the Scottish holiday where it is noted that 'the farm next to Mr Jeffrey lets for a boll of wheat, a boll of barley, and £3. 15. an acre' and that Mr Naismith had an 'invention for securing the safety of High Pressure Engine', he is ceaselessly observing—the prices of goods, the wages of labour, the fertility of soils, the milk yield of reindeer, the institutions of inheritance. . . .

Behind all this, we have the man. All Malthus's contemporaries who knew him, testified to the serenity and sweetness of his disposition. And here he is in person with his speculative interests, his very human curiosity and his wholesome delight in the small good things of life—a cheerful travelling companion, a perceptive observer, and a courteous, inquiring guest. Surely we must all be grateful to Dr McCleary for his scholarly initiative, to Mr Robert Malthus for his generosity with family treasures, and to Mrs James for her dedicated care with the difficult and protracted labours of editorship.

Since the discovery of these diaries, I have often thought of the pleasure which they would have given to Maynard Keynes who wrote so eloquently of their author and who valued so highly the ways of living and thinking for which he stood. How he would have relished the piquant details of travel and the agreeable parties at which such serious questions were discussed. It is a fitting thing that they should now be published by the Royal Economic Society whose fortunes he did so much to establish and whose meetings for so many years were made memorable by the liveliness of his wit and fancy.

ROBBINS

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Preface

Research today is becoming more and more a matter of teamwork, and this book is no exception. Never can a grateful editor have owed so much to so many, beginning with the first exacting task of typing the literal transcription of the MS journals, for which I cannot adequately thank Miss Prince and her assistants, always cheerful and ingenious, even when faced with difficulties which seemed beyond the scope of any machine.

As far as the editorial matter is concerned, the British Museum must have pride of place, where the staff of the Reading Room, Map Room and Manuscript Room were, as always, models of competent helpfulness. First in time, however, came the Golders Green Branch Library, and for some of the essential unpublished information about Malthus I am indebted to the Hertfordshire County Record Office, the Borough Muniment Room of Guildford, and the Bath Municipal Library, which contains the City's archives: the help given to research by the librarians and archivists of local authorities is not perhaps as well known or as much appreciated as it should be.

As the standard life of Malthus still remains to be written, some field-work was necessary to establish the basic facts. I am therefore extremely grateful to Prebendary H. W. Beck, the rector of Wotton, where Malthus was born and where his parents and two of his five sisters are buried; the Rev. G. R. Whitcombe, vicar of Harrow, where there is a memorial to another sister and to Malthus's maternal grandfather; the Rev. the Hon. F. A. R. Richards, vicar of Okewood, where Malthus was curate; the Rev. D. Harvey, rector of Claverton, where Malthus was married and where his only son was christened; and Prebendary G. Lester, rector of Bath Abbey, where Malthus was buried.

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must thank the Master and Council of Jesus College, Cambridge, for permission to quote from the letters of E. D. Clarke, and mention with more than formal gratitude the kindness of Dr Brittain, the Keeper of the Records, and Mrs Freda Jones, the archivist. For the Recollections of Malthus's niece, Louisa Bray, my warmest thanks are due both to Mr John Barclay of Shere, the owner of the MS, and to Miss Helen Lloyd, who lent me a copy of it. To Miss Lloyd, a Malthus cousin who still lives at Albury, and is a perfect guide on any Malthusian pilgrimage between Guildford and Dorking, I—and his future biographers—must be for ever grateful.

With regard to the *Scandinavian Journal*, I have to thank Dr T. K. Derry for indispensable help with history, topography, and individual biographies: I am also very grateful to him for assistance and advice concerning the work as a whole. For all the help and hospitality I was given in Norway, I should like to express my gratitude to the staff of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London, and to Kontorsjef S. S. Nilson of the Cultural Relations Department of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; I am also particularly indebted to Fru Boye of the Town Museum, and Fru Greftegreff of the National Gallery, in Oslo, and Fru Kagan and Fru Belsaas of the Museum and Library in Trondheim, as well as to the staff of the Folk Museums at Oslo, Trondheim, and Lillehammer. The interest they all showed in Malthus, as well as their generous kindness to me, will remain among my happiest memories.

More formal acknowledgement is due to Messrs Allen and Unwin for permission to quote from T. K. Derry, *A Short History of Norway*, and to Messrs Longmans Green and Co. for permission to quote from Michael Joyce, *Edinburgh: The Golden Age*. For permission to reproduce the plates acknowledgement is due to the following: to the Marshall Library of Economics, University of Cambridge for the frontispiece; to Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo, for Plate 2; to Portrettarkivet, Riksantikvaren, Oslo, for Plate 3; to the Cambridge University Librarian for Plate 5; to the Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab, Trondheim, for Plates 6 and 7; to the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery for Plates 8 and 9; and to the rector of Albury and the curator of Guildford Museum for Plate 11.

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In a work of this sort, the publisher who turns an annotated transcription into a book is faced with innumerable problems, scholarly, aesthetic, and financial, and I cannot leave unsaid the admiration and gratitude which anyone must feel who comes into contact with the Cambridge University Press. I am also extremely grateful to Professor Robinson, Secretary of the Royal Economic Society, for all the help he has given me, especially with the complications of the cash accounts and the letter in Appendix 3. Of course all errors and omissions remain my own, but without the patient and sympathetic assistance of everyone concerned, there would be a great many more of them.

It would be impossible to thank individually all those friends and relations who have helped with the index and proof-reading, often at much personal inconvenience, but I must mention especially the work done by Mr and Mrs Frank Hopkins, kind neighbours of Dr McCleary, who were the first people to read the transcript; their encouragement and criticism in the early days of the undertaking, as well as at the end, were invaluable.

Finally I must record my heart-felt gratitude to Mr Robert Malthus and Lord Robbins: to the former, for so generously allowing me to transcribe and publish the diaries, and to the latter, for bringing them to the attention of the Royal Economic Society; they have both been most sympathetically prompt with practical help, in every kind of crisis: but for their enthusiasm and unfailing support, this work could never have been accomplished at all by the present editor; still less could it have been, intermittently, the most absorbing and enjoyable of occupations for nearly four years.

June 1965

P. D. J.

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Introduction

There can be few educated people who would admit to never having heard of Malthus and his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, first published in 1798. Those more closely concerned with his work or his period, economists and historians, have long known that in the following year he travelled extensively in Scandinavia, which was then seldom visited by Englishmen other than merchants. He went with two friends, Otter and Clarke, and Clarke's nineteen-year-old pupil Cripps; the three older men, just in their thirties, were all Fellows of Jesus College, Cambridge. Malthus referred to this tour in the second edition of his *Essay*, which appeared in 1803, and some account of their journeys had been published both by Otter, in his *Memoir of Robert Malthus*,¹ and by Clarke in his *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa*: Clarke had, indeed, reason to be grateful to the Rev. Professor Malthus, who 'allowed the use of his own Manuscript Journal for the description of Norway'.² Not unnaturally, it had been taken for granted that these journals were irretrievably lost.

They came to light through the enterprise of the late Dr G. F. McCleary, whose book, *The Malthusian Population Theory*, was published in 1953. In 1960, at the age of ninety-two, Dr McCleary was still hoping to collect further material for a second edition, and so made an expedition to the Isle of Wight to visit Mr Robert Malthus, a descendant of Sydenham, the elder brother of Thomas Robert Malthus, and the only surviving member of the direct male line in this country. Dr McCleary was too blind to see for himself the Linnell portraits, but was delighted to be able to handle a small riding-switch which had belonged to 'Old Pop'. Nothing was discovered at the time,

¹ Attached to the second and posthumous edition of Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy* (1836). It is anonymous, but there is little doubt that it is Otter's work.

² Vol. v (1819), p. x.

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but a year later he received a parcel from Mr Malthus, containing the two main volumes of the *Scandinavian Journal*, and also a much smaller notebook with some odd jottings on economic matters and a short record of a continental tour which Malthus made in 1825 with his wife and two of their children. Mr Malthus knew what pleasure these would give to Dr McCleary, and told him to make what use of them he wished, asking only that they should eventually be given to Cambridge, to be deposited with other Malthus manuscripts which are already there.

Dr McCleary shared the excitement of his discovery with his friend Lord Robbins, and it is largely due to Lord Robbins that the Royal Economic Society has taken the responsibility for this publication. I myself became associated with the work as one of the group of honorary nieces who read to Dr McCleary in the last years of his blindness, and as his companion on the memorable trip to the Isle of Wight. When Dr McCleary died early in 1962, it became my task to transcribe the manuscripts and prepare them for publication. Mr Malthus not only readily gave permission for this to be done, but ransacked his shelves to see if he could find any more notebooks: he discovered the first two sections of the *Scandinavian Journal* and the diary of the Scottish holiday of 1826.

The diaries show that writing did not come easily to Malthus: they are full of crossings-out and interpolations, sometimes due to changes, mid-way, in the construction of a sentence, sometimes to avoid repetition, especially of adjectives, and occasionally to clear up ambiguity. I have left the text almost exactly as Malthus wrote it, with his erratic spelling and peculiar use of capital letters; all that has been done is to break up some of the longer passages into paragraphs, and to add a very few punctuation marks where the sense was not immediately clear. The words crossed out have been omitted (as otherwise the work would have been unreadable) except where they have some special significance; then they are given in footnotes.

Footnotes have also been used for references, factual statements, and short comments. Where a fuller explanation was needed, or where it seemed appropriate to quote at some length from the works of other writers, the editorial matter has been printed with the text in the body of the page, but in smaller type, and separated from it by horizontal lines. This arrange-

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ment, it is hoped, will not only give the reader the assistance he needs when reading the journals for the first time, but will also enable him, if he wishes, easily to skip all editorial comment, and read the diaries straight through just as Malthus wrote them. To make the diaries easier to follow, I have standardised the form in which the dates appear at the beginning of each entry.

While Malthus's spelling is erratic, his handwriting, once one is accustomed to it, is not difficult to read. The page that is reproduced as Plate 1 shows a typical extract. The text has been very carefully checked and I believe that what is here printed can be taken to be an accurate transcription of Malthus's journal. One must always remember that he wrote these diaries for his own use and not for publication, and that he possibly wrote late at night after he had been gathering information at a party, or during a tedious wait for horses at a farmhouse.

The main part of this book consists, therefore, of the very detailed journal which Malthus wrote of his Scandinavian travels in 1799, from his arrival at Cuxhaven on 25 May up to the time of his crossing the border from Norway to Sweden on 3 August. We know that he and his friend Otter went to Stockholm, Viborg, and St Petersburg, and that he kept up his journals, because he also lent this part of them to Clarke, in 1820, but the diaries from 4 August onwards are lost.

Although much of the journal is taken up with information which Malthus published almost verbatim, four years later, in the 1803 edition of the *Essay*,¹ it has also a human interest for anyone concerned with him as a person: it reveals a lovable young man (he was thirty-two when the first edition of the *Essay* was published, and possibly rather young for his age) who had just brought upon his head an unprecedented eruption of fury and prejudice. In his *Memoir* of him, Otter was to write of the tenor of Malthus's life as 'one of the most even, serene and peaceful that can well be imagined';² Malthus himself told Harriet Martineau many years after, in 1832, that he had suffered in spirits from the abuse lavished on him 'only just at first', and that it had never kept him awake a minute 'after the first fort-

¹ See Appendix 1.

² Written as an introduction to Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy* (London, 1836), p. xiii.

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night'.¹ One cannot help pondering, as one reads these journals, on what that searing fortnight (if fortnight it was) must have meant to this young country parson, very susceptible to the opposite sex, fearing to make a poor figure at a waltz,² and feeling all the shame of an adolescent at being considered the owner of a shabby cart.³

All who met Malthus are unanimous in agreeing with his niece Louisa Bray, that no one could know him without loving him, and something of this seems to have continued since his death, as has also the opprobrium of those who have never tried to know him. No editor or biographer could have had his way opened up before him with more warm interest and hospitality than I have had: talking about Malthus, even now, seems to generate the cheerful serenity and kindness of the man himself. Malthus emerges from these diaries as the perfect travelling companion, unselfish and good-humoured, prepared always to accommodate himself to the customs of the country, and eager for every kind of experience and information.

¹ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (London, 1877), I, 211.

² See pp. 108–9.

³ See p. 93.