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Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06756-0 - The History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line: Volume 1

Catharine Macaulay

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The History of England

from the Accession of James I
to that of the Brunswick Line

VOLUME 1

CATHARINE MACAULAY



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E N G L A N D.

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THE
HISTORY
OF
ENGLAND
FROM THE
ACCESSION of JAMES I.
TO THAT OF THE
BRUNSWICK LINE.
VOL. I.

By CATHERINE MACAULAY.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N.

THOUGH the rectitude of my intention has hitherto been, and, I trust in God! ever will be, my support, in the laborious task of delineating the political history of this country, yet I think it incumbent on me to give the public my reasons for undertaking a subject which has been already treated of by several ingenious and learned men. From my early youth I have read with delight those histories that exhibit Liberty in its most exalted state, the annals of the Roman and the Greek republics. Studies like these excite that natural love of freedom which lies latent in the breast of every rational being, till it is nipped by the frost of prejudice, or blasted by the influence of vice.

THE effect which almost constantly attends such reading operated on my inclinations in the strongest manner, and Liberty became the object of a secondary worship in my delighted imagination. A mind thus disposed can never see through the medium held up by party-writers; or incline to that extreme of candour which, by colouring the enormous vices, and
magnifying

magnifying the petty virtues, of wicked men, confound together in one undistinguished groupe, the exalted patriots that have illustriously figured in this country, with those time-serving placemen who have sacrificed the most essential interests of the public to the baseness of their private affections.

THE societies of the modern ages of the world are not constituted with powers to bring to an impartial tribunal men trusted in the higher offices of the state. Fame is the only reward which, in the present times, true virtue hath to hope; and the only punishment which the guilty great have to apprehend, is eternal infamy. The weight of punishment ought ever to be determined by the importance of the consequences which attend the crime: In this ballance the vices of men in public characters can admit of no alleviation. A good citizen is a credit to his country, and merits the approbation of every virtuous man. Patriots who have sacrificed their tender affections, their properties, their lives, to the interest of society, deserve a tribute of praise unmixed with any alloy. With regret do I accuse my country of inattention to the most exalted of their benefactors: Whilst they enjoy privileges unpossessed by other nations, they have lost a just sense of the merit of the men by whose virtues these privileges were attained; men that, with the hazard and even the loss of their lives, attacked the formidable

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formidable pretensions of the Stewart family, and set up the banners of liberty against a tyranny which had been established for a series of more than one hundred and fifty years; and this by the exertion of faculties, which, if compared with the barren produce of modern times, appear more than human. Neglect is not the only crime committed against these sacred characters. Party prejudice, and the more detestable principle of private interest, have painted the memoirs of past times in so false a light, that it is with difficulty we can trace features, which, if justly described, would exalt the worthies of this country beyond the fame of any set of men, which the annals of other nations can at any one period produce.

To do justice therefore to the memory of our illustrious ancestors to the utmost extent of my small abilities, still having an eye to public liberty, the standard by which I have endeavoured to measure the virtue of those characters that are treated of in this history, is the principal motive that induced me to undertake this intricate part of the English history. If the execution is deficient, the intention must be allowed to be meritorious; and if the goodness of my head may justly be questioned, my heart will stand the test of the most critical examination. In this country, where luxury has made a great progress, it is not to be supposed that the people of fortune will fathom the depth of politics,

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or examine the voluminous collections in which can only be found a faithful representation of the important transactions of past ages. It is the business of an historian to digest these, and to give a true and accurate sense of them to the public. I have ever looked upon a supposed knowledge of facts seen in the false mirror of misrepresentation as one of the great banes of this country. Individuals may err, but the public judgment is infallible. They only want a just information of facts to make a proper comment. Labour, to attain truth, integrity to set it in its full light, are indispensable duties in an historian. I can affirm that I am not wanting in those duties. The invidious censures which may ensue from striking into a path of literature rarely trodden by my sex, will not permit a selfish consideration to keep me mute in the cause of liberty and virtue, whilst the doctrine of slavery finds so many interested writers to defend it by fraud and sophistry, in opposition to the common reason of mankind and the experience of every age. Absurd as are the principles and notions, on which the doctrine of arbitrary power is established, there have been ever in this country found many to adopt it. The vulgar are at all times liable to be deceived, and this nation has ever produced a number of bad citizens, who, prone to be corrupted, have been the ready tools of wicked ministers and the zealous partizans, in a cause big with the ruin of the state, and the destruction of that felicity which the individuals

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dividuals of this country have for some years enjoyed. It is justly remarked by an able writer, “ That there may be a faction for the crown as well as against it, and conspiracies against freedom as well as against prerogative.” Whosoever attempts to remove the limitations necessary to render monarchy consistent with liberty, are rebels in the worst sense; rebels to the laws of their country, the law of nature, the law of reason, and the law of God. Can there be such men? was I to put the question to my own heart, it would answer, that it was impossible there should be such. But the annals of this country have a shameful tale to tell, that such a faction has ever existed in this state, from the earliest period of our present constitution.

THIS faction has not only prevented the establishing any regular system to preserve or improve our liberties; but lie at this time in wait for the first opportunity that the imperfections of this government may give them, to destroy those rights, which have been purchased by the toil and blood of the most exalted individuals that ever adorned humanity. To shew the causes of so great a malignancy it will be necessary to observe, that there are in every society a number of men to whom tyranny is in some measure profitable; men devoid of every virtue and qualification requisite to rise in a free state. The emoluments and favours they gain for supporting tyranny, are the only means by which they can obtain

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distinctions,

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distinctions, which in every equal government are the rewards of public service. The selfish affections of these men, exalted above worthier citizens, fancy a recompense in this exaltation ample enough for the sacrifice of their liberty. To avoid the censures of injured posterity, their children are brought up in the doctrine of a necessary servitude, and are taught to regard the champions of liberty as the disturbers of the peace of mankind. Hence is produced a numerous class of men, who having been educated in the principles of slavery, become the deluded instruments of all the villainous purposes of mean ambition.

SOME there are, who envying the reputation which illustrious characters have acquired, bend their endeavours to destroy the genuine notions of virtue and public utility, on which the fame of great men is built. Others, whose affections are of so base an alloy, that they envy the independency which every individual of this country may enjoy, and would willingly forfeit that natural privilege to superior tyrants, provided they might have the power of domineering over the lower class of people. Others again, who having drudged through what is called a regular education, with much learning or rather reading, but without judgment to have acquired any real knowledge, become a magazine of other men's conceits, and commence the disciples of the first doctrine which accident flings in their way.

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These scholars, in the pursuit of science, lose the distinctions of common sense, and are as obstinately fixed in the prejudices of the authors with whom they have conversed, as if these prejudices were the produce of their own imaginations. Hence proceed those opposite opinions among the speculative part of mankind in regard to popular and monarchical privileges. All men can acquire the jargon of terms, but the depth of science is only to be attained by genius. The greater proportion of ignorance there may be in a disputant, the more reluctant he is to give way to reasoning that contradicts the borrowed opinions which he has taken in the gross; he looks with a sovereign contempt on his antagonist, not because he can confute his arguments, but because his arguments contradict the tenets that have been laid down by Hobbs, and other writers of that stamp. Unequal to the combat, he skirmishes at a distance, wilfully converses in generals, and never enters into those particulars which may investigate the subject. Men like these, without the desire of attaining truth, wrangle but for victory; and if they have sense enough to see their mistakes, they never have candor enough to acknowledge them.

THE general education of the English youth is not adapted to cherish those generous sentiments of independency, which is the only characteristic of a real gentleman. The business of the public schools is nothing more

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more than to teach the rudiments of grammar, and a certain degree of perfection in the Latin and Greek tongues. Whilst the languages of these once illustrious nations are the objects of attention, the divine precepts which they taught and practised are totally neglected. From the circle of these barren studies, the school-boy is transplanted into the university. Here he is supposed to be initiated in every branch of knowledge which distinguishes the man of education from the ignorant herd; but here, as I am told and have great reason to believe, are taught doctrines little calculated to form patriots to support and defend the privileges of the subject in this limited monarchy. “In these seats of education, says an ingenious author, instead of being formed to love their country and constitution, the laws and liberties of it, they are rather disposed to love arbitrary government, and to become slaves to absolute monarchy. A change of interest, provocation, or some other consideration, may set them right as to the public; but they have no inward principle of love to their country and of public liberty; so that they are easily brought to like slavery, if they may be made the tools for managing it.” The study of history is little cultivated in these seminaries, and not at all those fundamental principles of the English constitution on which our ancestors founded a system of government, in which the liberty of the subject is as absolutely instituted as the dignity of the sovereign.*

* I take this opportunity of mentioning the late excellent institution
in

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Yet the knowledge of these fundamental principles are as necessary to understand this system of government, as the knowledge of them was necessary to construct it.

THE form of the constitution may be preserved, when the spirit of it is lost ; and nothing is more likely to happen, whilst those persons who are constituted to maintain it, are ignorant of those fundamental principles, on which the barriers, that defend civil liberty from prerogative, are founded. Prejudiced with a love of slavery, or at least ignorant of the advantages of liberty, the last part of the education of the men of fortune in this country, is what is called the tour of Europe, that is a residence for two or three years in the countries of France and Italy. This is the finishing stroke that renders them useless to all the good purposes of preserving the birth-right of an Englishman. Without being able to distinguish the different natures of different governments, their advantages, their disadvantages ; without being able to comprehend how infinitely they affect the interest and happiness of individuals, they grow charmed with every thing that is foreign, are caught with the gaudy tinsel of a superb

in the university of Oxford ; of a profession of the common law of England ; which, if carried on with the same ability and spirit that Dr. Blackstone has begun it, must be productive of the greatest public utility.

court,

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court, the frolic levity of unreflecting slaves, and thus deceived by appearances, are rivetted in a taste for servitude.

THESE are the causes which occasion the irrational inclinations of many of the English people in regard to government: and would to God that these, tho' very important in themselves, were the only ones that liberty had to fear. In forming of this government a latent evil crept into the vitals of the state, and hath in the course of time poisoned every part of the constitution. Corruption, that undermining mischief, hath sapped the foundation of a fabric, whose building was cemented with the blood of our best citizens. The growing evil hath spread far and wide, tainted the minds of men with such an incurable degeneracy, that the virtue of our forefathers is become the ridicule of every modern politician.

IT is become an established maxim, that corruption is a necessary engine of government. There are some amongst us who have not been ashamed to say, that it is proper for the other parts of the legislature to depend on the monarch by corruption. How opposite this is to the genius and spirit of our constitution, is too apparent to need a proof. That the consequences of it are already severely felt in this country, our debts and heavy taxes fatally demonstrate. How destructive it is to
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every virtue that preserves society, or dignifies human nature, is as apparent. This is a sad but certain truth, that corruption is so general amongst us that it has dissolved the sacred bonds of mutual trust. By the influence of bribery, every man in these days has a triple temptation to sin against his country: The emoluments of favour; the fear of being laughed at for his honesty; of being abandoned by his associates, and left single to stand the insults of a victorious faction.

IF I have digressed from the subject I set out with, which was to inform the public of my intention in writing this history, they will, I hope, excuse a warmth which national evils have excited in a breast zealous in the cause of Liberty, and attached with a fervent devotion to the civil rights of my country. There remains nothing now but to assure my readers that I shall finish this morsel of history, to the accession of the Brunswick Line, with the same indefatigable industry that I have executed this small part of it: and having nothing so much in view as the investigation of truth, shall pursue it with an integrity that, I think, cannot justly be called in question by the most invidious inquisitors.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N.

THE inaccuracies of stile which may be found in this composition, will, I hope, find favour from the candour of the public; and the defects of a female hiftorian, in these points, not weighed in the ballance of severe criticism.

A D-

ADDRESS to LIBERTY.

OH, first and most benevolent of powers !
Come from eternal splendors ; here on earth,
Against despotic pride, and rage, and lust,
To shield mankind ; to raise them to assert
The native rights and honour of their race.
Teach me, thy lowliest subject, but in zeal
Yielding to none, the PROGRESS OF THY REIGN ;
And with a strain from thee enrich the Muse :
As THEE alone she serves, her patron THOU,
And great inspirer be ! Then will she joy,
Tho' narrow life her lot, and private shade.
And when her venal voice she barter's vile,
Or to thy open or thy secret foes,
May ne'er those sacred raptures touch her more,
By flattery hearts unfelt ! and may her WORK
Sink in oblivion with the nameless crew,
Vermin of state ! to thy o'erflowing light
That owe their being, yet betray thy cause.

THOMSON.

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E R R A T A.

Note, page 17, line 13, read *to confer on any matter of that nature*—text, p. 18, l. 3, read, instead of *public utility, the good of the public*—note, p. 45, l. 6, read *occasion to call all to new question*—note, p. 74, l. 3, read *apostasia*—note, p. 74, l. 10, for *repentyr* read *refentyr*—note, p. 74, l. 12, for *faire* read *faixa*—note, p. 74, l. 13, for *sera* read *fera*—p. 76, l. 21, read *Seymour*—note, p. 85, l. 2, read *giveth use, but no propriety*, meaning *property*—note, p. 95, l. 20, read *p.* 346—note, p. 96, l. 6, read *card-holder*—p. 97, l. 5, for *Aboit* read *Abbot*—note, p. 120, l. 6, dele *of*—note, p. 120, l. 14, for *design* read *desire*—note, p. 120, l. 31, read 290 for 240—note, p. 122, l. 9, read *from Mr. John Hales to Sir Dudley Carleton*—p. 157, the sentence beginning, *By James's manner, &c.* ought to be a note—p. 157, l. 27, read *was to obtain a supply for his necessities*—text, p. 229, l. 20, read *the prince*—note, p. 250, l. 22, read *scire facias*—text, p. 259, line 22, read *he obtained*—p. 308, quotation from Rushworth, p. 207—p. 329, l. 28, read *oppression* for *opposition*—note, p. 365, l. 5, read *p.* 9.