

# ТОМАС КАРЛЕЙЛЬ

ON THE CHOICE  
OF BOOKS

**Томас Карлейль**  
**On the Choice of Books**

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*On the Choice of Books:*

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# Thomas Carlyle

## On the Choice of Books

### BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

There comes a time in the career of every man of genius who has devoted a long life to the instruction and enlightenment of his fellow-creatures, when he receives before his death all the honours paid by posterity. Thus when a great essayist or historian lives to attain a classic and world-wide fame, his own biography becomes as interesting to the public as those he himself has written, and by which he achieved his laurels.

This is almost always the case when a man of such cosmopolitan celebrity outlives the ordinary allotted period of threescore years and ten; for a younger generation has then sprung up, who only hear of his great fame, and are ignorant of the long and painful steps by which it was achieved. These remarks are peculiarly applicable in regard to the man whose career we are now to dwell on for a short time: his genius was of slow growth and development, and his fame was even more tardy in coming; but since the world some forty years ago fairly recognised him as a great and original thinker and teacher, few men have left so indelible an impress on the public mind, or have influenced to so great a degree the most thoughtful of their

contemporaries.

Thomas Carlyle was born on Tuesday, December 4th, 1795, at Ecclefechan, a small village in the district of Annandale, Dumfriesshire. His father, a stone-mason, was noted for quickness of mental perception, and great energy and decision of character; his mother, as affectionate, pious, and more than ordinarily intelligent;<sup>1</sup> and thus accepting his own theory, that "the history of a man's childhood is the description of his parents' environment," Carlyle entered upon the "mystery of life" under happy and enviable circumstances. After preliminary instruction, first at the parish school, and afterwards at Annan, he went, in November, 1809, and when he was fourteen years old, to the University of Edinburgh. Here he remained till the summer of 1814, distinguishing himself by his devotion to mathematical studies then taught there by Professor Leslie. As a student, he was irregular in his application, but when he did set to work, it was with his whole energy. He appears to have been a great reader of general literature at this time, and the stories that are told of the books that he got through are scarcely to be credited. In the summer of 1814, on the resignation of Mr. Waugh, Carlyle obtained, by competitive examination at Dumfries, the

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<sup>1</sup> James Carlyle was born in August, 1758, and died January 23, 1832. His second wife (whose maiden name was Margaret Aitken), was born in September, 1771, and died on Christmas Day, 1853. There were nine children of this marriage, "whereof four sons and three daughters," says the inscription on the tombstone in the burial-ground at Ecclefechan, "survived, gratefully reverent of such a father and such a mother."

post of mathematical master at Annan Academy. Although he had, at his parents' desire, commenced his studies with a view to entering the Scottish Church, the idea of becoming a minister was growingly distasteful to him. A fellow-student describes his habits at this time as lonely and contemplative; and we know from another source that his vacations were principally spent among the hills and by the rivers of his native county. In the summer of 1816 he was promoted to the post of "classical and mathematical master" at the old Burgh or Grammar School at Kirkcaldy. At the new school in that town Edward Irving, whose acquaintance Carlyle first made at Edinburgh, about Christmas, 1815, had been established since the year 1812; they were thus brought closely together, and their intimacy soon ripened into a friendship destined to become famous. At Kirkcaldy Carlyle remained over two years, becoming more and more convinced that neither as minister nor as schoolmaster was he to successfully fight his way up in the world. It had become clear to him that literature was his true vocation, and he would have started in the profession at once, had it been convenient for him to do so.

He had already written several articles and essays, and a few of them had appeared in print; but they gave little promise or indication of the power he was afterwards to exhibit. During the years 1820—1823, he contributed a series of articles (biographical and topographical) to Brewster's "Edinburgh Encyclopaedia,"<sup>2</sup> viz.:—

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<sup>2</sup> Vols. XIV. to XVI. The fourteenth volume bears at the end the imprint, "Edinburgh,

1. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
2. Montaigne
3. Montesquieu
4. Montfaucon
5. Dr. Moore
6. Sir John Moore
7. Necker
8. Nelson
9. Netherlands
10. Newfoundland
11. Norfolk
12. Northamptonshire
13. Northumberland
14. Mungo Park
15. Lord Chatham
16. William Pitt.

The following is from the article on *Necker*:—

"As an author, Necker displays much irregular force of imagination, united with considerable perspicuity and compass of thought; though his speculations are deformed by an undue attachment to certain leading ideas, which, harmonizing with his habits of mind, had acquired an excessive preponderance in the course of his long and uncontroverted meditations. He possessed

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printed by Balfour and Clarke, 1820;" and the sixteenth volume, "Printed by A. Balfour and Co., Edinburgh, 1823." Most of these articles are distinguished by the initials "T.C."; but they are all attributed to Carlyle in the List of the Authors of the Principal Articles, prefixed to the work on its completion.

extensive knowledge, and his works bespeak a philosophical spirit; but their great and characteristic excellence proceeds from that glow of fresh and youthful admiration for everything that is amiable or august in the character of man, which, in Necker's heart, survived all the blighting vicissitudes it had passed through, *combining, in a singular union, the fervour of the stripling with the experience of the sage.*"<sup>3</sup>

Here is a passage from the article on *Newfoundland*, interesting as containing perhaps the earliest germ of the later style:—

"The ships intended for the fishery on the southeast coast, arrive early in June. Each takes her station opposite any unoccupied part of the beach where the fish may be most conveniently cured, and retains it till the end of the season. Formerly the master who arrived first on any station was constituted *fishing-admiral*, and had by law the power of settling disputes among the other crews. But the jurisdiction of those *admirals* is now happily superseded by the regular functionaries who reside on shore. Each captain directs his whole attention to the collection of his own cargo, without minding the concerns

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<sup>3</sup> "In the earliest authorship of Mr. Carlyle," says Mr. James Russell Lowell, alluding to these papers, "we find some not obscure hints of the future man. The outward fashion of them is that of the period; but they are distinguished by a certain security of judgment, remarkable at any time, remarkable especially in one so young. Carlyle, in these first essays, already shows the influence of his master Goethe, the most widely receptive of critics. In a compact notice of Montaigne there is not a word as to his religious scepticism. The character is looked at purely from its human and literary sides."



of his neighbour. Having taken down what part of the rigging is removable, they set about their laborious calling, and must pursue it zealously. Their mode of proceeding is thus described by Mr. Anspach, *a clerical person, who lived in the island several years, and has since written a meagre and very confused book, which he calls a HISTORY of it.*"

To the "New Edinburgh Review" (1821-22) Carlyle also contributed two papers—one on Joanna Baillie's "Metrical Legends," and one on Goethe's "Faust."

In the year 1822 he made a translation of "Legendre's Geometry," to which he prefixed an Essay on Proportion; and the book appeared a year or two afterwards under the auspices of the late Sir David Brewster.<sup>4</sup> The Essay on Proportion remains to this day the most lucid and succinct exposition of the subject hitherto published.

"I was already," says Carlyle in his *Reminiscences*, "getting my head a little up, translating 'Legendre's Geometry' for Brewster. I still remember a happy forenoon in which I did a *Fifth Book* (or complete 'doctrine of proportion') for that work, complete really and lucid, and yet one of the briefest ever known. It was begun and done that forenoon, and I have (except correcting the

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<sup>4</sup> "Elements of Geometry and Trigonometry," with Notes. Translated from the French of A.M. Legendre. Edited by David Brewster, LL.D. With Notes and Additions, and an Introductory Chapter on Proportion. Edinburgh: published by Oliver and Boyd; and G. and W.B. Whittaker, London. 1824, pp. xvi., 367. Sir David Brewster's Preface, in which he speaks of "an Introduction on Proportion, by the Translator," is dated *Edinburgh, August 1, 1822.*

press next week) never seen it since; but still I feel as if it were right enough and felicitous in its kind! I only got £50 for my entire trouble in that 'Legendre;' but it was an honest job of work, honestly done."<sup>5</sup>

The late Professor de Morgan—an excellent authority—pronounced a high eulogium upon this Essay on Proportion.

In 1822 Carlyle accepted the post of tutor to Charles Buller, of whose early death and honourable promise, two touching records remain to us, one in verse by Thackeray, and one in prose by Carlyle.

For the next four years Carlyle devoted his attention almost exclusively to German literature.

His *Life of Schiller* first appeared under the title of "Schiller's Life and Writings," in the London Magazine.

**Part I.—October, 1823. Part II.—January, 1824. Part III.—July, 1824. " August, 1824. " September, 1824.**

It was enlarged, and separately published by Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, the proprietors of the Magazine, in 1825.

The translation of "*Wilhelm Meister*," in 1824,<sup>6</sup> was the first real introduction of Goethe to the reading world of Great Britain. It appeared without the name of the translator, but its merits were too palpable to be overlooked, though some critics objected to the strong infusion of German phraseology which had been

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<sup>5</sup> *Reminiscences by Thomas Carlyle*, Edited by James Anthony Froude. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1881, Vol. 1., pp. 198-199.

<sup>6</sup> *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. 3 Vols., Edinburgh, 1824.

imported into the English version. This acquired idiom never left our author, even in his original works, although the "Life of Schiller," written but a few months before, is almost entirely free from the peculiarity. "Wilhelm Meister," in its English dress, was better received by the English reading public than by English critics. De Quincey, in one of his dyspeptic fits, fell upon the book, its author, and the translator,<sup>7</sup> and Lord Jeffrey, in the Edinburgh Review, although admitting Carlyle to be a talented person, heaped condemnation upon the work.

Carlyle's next work was a series of translations, entitled "German Romance: Specimens of the chief Authors; with Biographical and Critical Notices." 4 vols. Edinburgh, 1827. The Preface and Introductions are reprinted in the second volume of Carlyle's Collected Works: the Specimens translated from Hoffmann and La Motte Fouqué, have not been reprinted.

"This," says Carlyle, in 1857, "was a Book of Translations, not of my suggesting or desiring, but of my executing as honest journey-work in defect of better. The pieces selected were the suitablest discoverable on such terms: not quite of *less* than no worth (I considered) any piece of them; nor, alas, of a very high worth any, except one only. Four of these lots, or quotas to the adventure, Musæus's, Tieck's, Richter's, Goethe's, will be given in the final stage of this Series; the rest we willingly leave, afloat or stranded, as waste driftwood, to those whom they may farther

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<sup>7</sup> Curiously enough in the very numbers of the "London Magazine" containing the later instalments of Carlyle's Life of Schiller.

concern."

It was in 1826 that Mr. Carlyle married Miss Jane Welsh, the only child of Dr. John Welsh, of Haddington,<sup>8</sup> a lineal descendant of John Knox, and a lady fitted in every way to be the wife of such a man. For some time after marriage he continued to reside at Edinburgh, but in May, 1828, he took up his residence in his native county, at Craigenputtoch—a solitary farmhouse on a small estate belonging to his wife's mother, about fifteen miles from Dumfries, and in one of the most secluded parts of the country. Most of his letters to Goethe were written from this place.

In one of the letters sent from Craigenputtoch to Weimar, bearing the date of 25th September, 1828, we have a charming picture of our author's seclusion and retired literary life at this period:—

"You inquire with such warm interest respecting our present abode and occupations, that I feel bound to say a few words about both, while there is still room left. Dumfries is a pleasant town, containing about fifteen thousand inhabitants, and may be considered the centre of the trade and judicial system of a district which possesses some importance in the sphere of Scottish industry. Our residence is not in the town itself, but fifteen miles to the north-west, among the granite hills and the black morasses

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<sup>8</sup> Her father had been dead some seven years when Carlyle and she were married, and the life interest of her inheritance in the farm of Craigenputtoch had been made over to her mother, who survived until 1842, when it reverted to Carlyle.

which stretch westward through Galloway, almost to the Irish Sea. In this wilderness of heath and rock, our estate stands forth a green oasis, a tract of ploughed, partly enclosed, and planted ground, where corn ripens, and trees afford a shade, although surrounded by sea-mews and rough-woolled sheep. Here, with no small effort, have we built and furnished a neat, substantial dwelling; here, in the absence of professorial or other office, we live to cultivate literature according to our strength, and in our own peculiar way. We wish a joyful growth to the rose and flowers of our garden; we hope for health and peaceful thoughts to further our aims. The roses, indeed, are still in part to be planted, but they blossom already in anticipation. Two ponies, which carry us everywhere, and the mountain air, are the best medicines for weak nerves. This daily exercise—to which I am much devoted—is my only recreation: for this nook of ours is the loneliest in Britain—six miles removed from any one likely to visit me. Here Rousseau would have been as happy as on his island of St. Pierre. My town friends, indeed, ascribe my sojourn here to a similar disposition, and forbode me no good result. But I came hither solely with the design to simplify my way of life, and to secure the independence through which I could be enabled to remain true to myself. This bit of earth is our own; here we can live, write, and think, as best pleases ourselves, even though Zoilus himself were to be crowned the monarch of literature. Nor is the solitude of such great importance; for a stage-coach takes us speedily to Edinburgh, which we look upon as our British

Weimar. And have I not, too, at this moment piled up upon the table of my little library a whole cart-load of French, German, American, and English journals and periodicals—whatever may be their worth? Of antiquarian studies, too, there is no lack. From some of our heights I can descry, about a day's journey to the west, the hill where Agricola and his Romans left a camp behind them. At the foot of it I was born, and there both father and mother still live to love me. And so one must let time work."

The above letter was printed by Goethe himself, in his Preface to a German translation of Carlyle's "Life of Schiller," published at Frankfort in 1830. Other pleasant records of the intercourse between them exist in the shape of sundry graceful copies of verses addressed by Goethe to Mrs. Carlyle, which will be found in the collection of his poems.

Carlyle had now fairly started as an original writer. From the lonely farm of Craigenputtock went forth the brilliant series of Essays contributed to the Edinburgh, Westminster, and Foreign Reviews, and to Fraser's Magazine, which were not long in gaining for him a literary reputation in both hemispheres. To this lonely farm came one day in August, 1833, armed with a letter of introduction, a visitor from the other side of the Atlantic: a young American, then unknown to fame, by name Ralph Waldo Emerson. The meeting of these two remarkable men was thus described by the younger of them, many years afterwards:—

"I came from Glasgow to Dumfries, and being intent on delivering a letter which I had brought from Rome, inquired

for Craigenputtoch. It was a farm in Nithsdale, in the parish of Dunscore, sixteen miles distant. No public coach passed near it, so I took a private carriage from the inn. I found the house amid desolate heathery hills, where the lonely scholar nourished his mighty heart. Carlyle was a man from his youth, an author who did not need to hide from his readers, and as absolute a man of the world, unknown and exiled on that hill-farm, as if holding on his own terms what is best in London. He was tall and gaunt, with a cliff-like brow, self-possessed, and holding his extraordinary powers of conversation in easy command; clinging to his northern accent with evident relish; full of lively anecdote, and with a streaming humour, which floated everything he looked upon. His talk playfully exalting the familiar objects, put the companion at once into an acquaintance with his Lars and Lemurs, and it was very pleasant to learn what was predestined to be a pretty mythology. Few were the objects and lonely the man, 'not a person to speak to within sixteen miles except the minister of Dunscore; so that books inevitably made his topics.

"He had names of his own for all the matters familiar to his discourse. 'Blackwood's' was the 'sand magazine;' 'Fraser's' nearer approach to possibility of life was the 'mud magazine;' a piece of road near by that marked some failed enterprise was 'the grave of the last sixpence.' When too much praise of any genius annoyed him, he professed hugely to admire the talent shewn by his pig. He had spent much time and contrivance in confining the poor beast to one enclosure in his pen, but pig, by great strokes

of judgment, had found out how to let a board down, and had foiled him. For all that, he still thought man the most plastic little fellow in the planet, and he liked Nero's death, 'Qualis artifex pereo!' better than most history. He worships a man that will manifest any truth to him. At one time he had inquired and read a good deal about America. Landor's principle was mere rebellion, and that he feared was the American principle. The best thing he knew of that country was, that in it a man can have meat for his labour. He had read in Stewart's book, that when he inquired in a New York hotel for the Boots, he had been shown across the street, and had found Mungo in his own house dining on roast turkey.

"We talked of books. Plato he does not read, and he disparaged Socrates; and, when pressed, persisted in making Mirabeau a hero. Gibbon he called the splendid bridge from the old world to the new. His own reading had been multifarious. Tristram Shandy was one of his first books after Robinson Crusoe, and Robertson's America an early favourite. Rousseau's Confessions had discovered to him that he was not a dunce; and it was now ten years since he had learned German, by the advice of a man who told him he would find in that language what he wanted.

"He took despairing or satirical views of literature at this moment; recounted the incredible sums paid in one year by the great booksellers for puffing. Hence it comes that no newspaper is trusted now, no books are bought, and the booksellers are on



the eve of bankruptcy.

"He still returned to English pauperism, the crowded country, the selfish abdication by public men of all that public persons should perform. 'Government should direct poor men what to do. Poor Irish folk come wandering over these moors. My dame makes it a rule to give to every son of Adam bread to eat, and supplies his wants to the next house. But here are thousands of acres which might give them all meat, and nobody to bid these poor Irish go to the moor and till it. They burned the stacks, and so found a way to force the rich people to attend to them.'

"We went out to walk over long hills, and looked at Criffel, then without his cap, and down into Wordsworth's country. There we sat down, and talked of the immortality of the soul. It was not Carlyle's fault that we talked on that topic, for he had the natural disinclination of every nimble spirit to bruise itself against walls, and did not like to place himself where no step can be taken. But he was honest and true, and cognizant of the subtile links that bind ages together, and saw how every event affects all the future. 'Christ died on the tree: that built Dunscore kirk yonder: that brought you and me together. Time has only a relative existence.'

"He was already turning his eyes towards London with a scholar's appreciation. London is the heart of the world, he said, wonderful only from the mass of human beings. He liked the huge machine. Each keeps its own round. The baker's boy brings muffins to the window at a fixed hour every day, and that is all the Londoner knows, or wishes to know, on the subject. But it turned

out good men. He named certain individuals, especially one man of letters, his friend, the best mind he knew, whom London had well served."<sup>9</sup>

"Carlyle," says Emerson, "was already turning his eyes towards London," and a few months after the interview just described he did finally fix his residence there, in a quiet street in Chelsea, leading down to the river-side. Here, in an old-fashioned house, built in the reign of Queen Anne, he and his wife settled down in the early summer of 1834; here they continued to live together until she died; and here Carlyle afterwards lived on alone till the end of his life.

With another man, of whom he now became the neighbour—Leigh Hunt—he had already formed a slight acquaintance, which soon ripened into a warm friendship and affection on both sides, in spite of their singular difference of temperament and character.

"It was on the 8th of February, 1832," says Mr. Thornton Hunt, "that the writer of the essays named 'Characteristics' received, apparently from Mr. Leigh Hunt, a volume entitled 'Christianism,' for which he begged to express his thanks. By the 20th of February, Carlyle, then lodging in London, was inviting Leigh Hunt to tea, as the means of their first meeting; and by the 20th of November, Carlyle wrote from Dumfries, urging Leigh Hunt to 'come hither and see us when you want to rusticate a month. Is that for ever impossible?' The philosopher afterwards

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<sup>9</sup> "English Traits," by R.W. Emerson. First Visit to England.

came to live in the next street to his correspondent, in Chelsea, and proved to be one of Leigh Hunt's kindest, most faithful, and most considerate friends."<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Horne tells a story very characteristic of both men. Soon after the publication of "Heroes and Hero Worship," they were at a small party, when a conversation was started between these two concerning the heroism of man. "Leigh Hunt had said something about the islands of the blest, or El Dorado, or the Millennium, and was flowing on his bright and hopeful way, when Carlyle dropped some heavy tree-trunk across Hunt's pleasant stream, and banked it up with philosophical doubts and objections at every interval of the speaker's joyous progress. But the unmitigated Hunt never ceased his overflowing anticipations, nor the saturnine Carlyle his infinite demurs to those finite flourishings. The listeners laughed and applauded by turns; and had now fairly pitted them against each other, as the philosopher of hopefulness and of the unhopeful. The contest continued with all that ready wit and philosophy, that mixture of pleasantry and profundity, that extensive knowledge of books and character, with their ready application in argument or illustration, and that perfect ease and good nature which distinguish both of these men. The opponents were so well matched that it was quite clear the contest would never come to an end. But the night was far advanced, and the party broke up. They all sallied forth,

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<sup>10</sup> From "The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt," edited by his eldest son. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1862. Vol. 1., p. 321.

and leaving the close room, the candles and the arguments behind them, suddenly found themselves in presence of a most brilliant starlight night. They all looked up. 'Now,' thought Hunt, 'Carlyle's done for! he can have no answer to that!' 'There,' shouted Hunt, 'look up there, look at that glorious harmony, that sings with infinite voices an eternal song of Hope in the soul of man.' Carlyle looked up. They all remained silent to hear what he would say. They began to think he was silenced at last—he was a mortal man. But out of that silence came a few low-toned words, in a broad Scotch accent. And who on earth could have anticipated what the voice said? 'Eh! it's a sad sight!' Hunt sat down on a stone step. They all laughed—then looked very thoughtful. Had the finite measured itself with infinity, instead of surrendering itself up to the influence? Again they laughed—then bade each other good night, and betook themselves homeward with slow and serious pace."<sup>11</sup>

In 1840 Leigh Hunt left Chelsea, and went to live at Kensington, but Carlyle never altogether lost sight of him, and on several occasions was able to do him very serviceable acts of kindness; as, for instance, in writing certain Memoranda concerning him with the view of procuring from Government a small provision for Leigh Hunt's declining years, which we may as well give in this place:—

### **MEMORANDA CONCERNING MR. LEIGH HUNT.**

"1. That Mr. Hunt is a man of the most indisputedly superior

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<sup>11</sup> "A New Spirit of the Age," by R.H. Home. London, 1844. Vol. . p. 278.

worth; a *Man of Genius* in a very strict sense of that word, and in all the senses which it bears or implies; of brilliant varied gifts, of graceful fertility, of clearness, lovingness, truthfulness; of childlike open character; also of most pure and even exemplary private deportment; a man who can be other than *loved* only by those who have not seen him, or seen him from a distance through a false medium.

"2. That, well seen into, he *has* done much for the world;—as every man possessed of such qualities, and freely speaking them forth in the abundance of his heart for thirty years long, must needs do: *how* much, they that could judge best would perhaps estimate highest.

"3. That, for one thing, his services in the cause of reform, as Founder and long as Editor of the 'Examiner' newspaper; as Poet, Essayist, Public Teacher in all ways open to him, are great and evident: few now living in this kingdom, perhaps, could boast of greater.

"4. That his sufferings in that same cause have also been great; legal prosecution and penalty (not dishonourable to him; nay, honourable, were the whole truth known, as it will one day be): illegal obloquy and calumny through the Tory Press;—perhaps a greater quantity of baseless, persevering, implacable calumny, than any other living writer has undergone. Which long course of hostility (nearly the cruellest conceivable, had it not been carried on in half, or almost total misconception) may be regarded as the beginning of his other worst distresses, and a main cause of

them, down to this day.

"5. That he is heavily laden with domestic burdens, more heavily than most men, and his economical resources are gone from him. For the last twelve years he has toiled continually, with passionate diligence, with the cheerfullest spirit; refusing no task; yet hardly able with all this to provide for the day that was passing over him; and now, after some two years of incessant effort in a new enterprise ('The London Journal') that seemed of good promise, it also has suddenly broken down, and he remains in ill health, age creeping on him, without employment, means, or outlook, in a situation of the painfullest sort. Neither do his distresses, nor did they at any time, arise from wastefulness, or the like, on his own part (he is a man of humble wishes, and can live with dignity on little); but from crosses of what is called Fortune, from injustice of other men, from inexperience of his own, and a guileless trustfulness of nature, the thing and things that have made him unsuccessful make him in reality *more* loveable, and plead for him in the minds of the candid.

"6. That such a man is rare in a Nation, and of high value there; not to be *procured* for a whole Nation's revenue, or recovered when taken from us, and some £200 a year is the price which this one, whom we now have, is valued at: with that sum he were lifted above his perplexities, perhaps saved from nameless wretchedness! It is believed that, in hardly any other way could £200 abolish as much suffering, create as much benefit, to one man, and through him to many and all.

"Were these things set fitly before an English Minister, in whom great part of England recognises (with surprise at such a novelty) a man of insight, fidelity and decision, is it not probable or possible that he, though from a quite opposite point of view, might see them in somewhat of a similar light; and, so seeing, determine to do in consequence? *Ut fiat!*"

**"T.C."**

"Some years later," says a writer in "Macmillan's Magazine,"<sup>12</sup> "in the 'mellow evening' of a life that had been so stormy, Mr. Leigh Hunt himself told the story of his struggles, his victories, and his defeats, with so singularly graceful a frankness, that the most supercilious of critics could not but acknowledge that here was an autobiographer whom it was possible to like. Here is Carlyle's estimate of Leigh Hunt's Autobiography:—

"Chelsea, June 17, 1850.

**"DEAR HUNT,**

"I have just finished your Autobiography, which has been most pleasantly occupying all my leisure these three days; and you must permit me to write you a word upon it, out of the fulness of the heart, while the impulse is still fresh to thank you. This good book, in every sense one of the best I have read this long while, has awakened many old thoughts which never were extinct, or even properly asleep, but which (like so much else) have had to fall silent amid the tempests of an evil time—Heaven mend it! A word from me once more, I know, will not

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<sup>12</sup> July, 1862.

be unwelcome, while the world is talking of you.

"Well, I call this an excellent good book, by far the best of the autobiographic kind I remember to have read in the English language; and indeed, except it be Boswell's of Johnson, I do not know where we have such a picture drawn of a human life, as in these three volumes.

"A pious, ingenious, altogether human and worthy book; imaging, with graceful honesty and free felicity, many interesting objects and persons on your life-path, and imaging throughout, what is best of all, a gifted, gentle, patient, and valiant human soul, as it buffets its way through the billows of the time, and will not drown though often in danger; cannot *be* drowned, but conquers and leaves a track of radiance behind it: that, I think, conies out more clearly to me than in any other of your books;—and that, I can venture to assure you, is the best of all results to realise in a book or written record. In fact, this book has been like an exercise of devotion to me; I have not assisted at any sermon, liturgy or litany, this long while, that has had so religious an effect on me. Thanks in the name of all men. And believe, along with me, that this book will be welcome to other generations as well as to ours. And long may you live to write more books for us; and may the evening sun be softer on you (and on me) than the noon sometimes was!

"Adieu, dear Hunt (you must let me use this familiarity, for I am an old fellow too now, as well as you). I have often thought of coming up to see you once more; and perhaps I shall, one



of these days (though horribly sick and lonely, and beset with spectral lions, go whitherward I may): but whether I do or not believe for ever in my regard. And so, God bless you,

"Prays heartily,

**"T. CARLYLE."**

On the other hand Leigh Hunt had an enthusiastic reverence for Carlyle. There are several incidental allusions to the latter, of more or less consequence, in Hunt's Autobiography, but the following is the most interesting:—

*"Carlyle's Paramount Humanity.*—I believe that what Mr. Carlyle loves better than his fault-finding, with all its eloquence, is the face of any human creature that looks suffering, and loving, and sincere; and I believe further, that if the fellow-creature were suffering only, and neither loving nor sincere, but had come to a pass of agony in this life which put him at the mercies of some good man for some last help and consolation towards his grave, even at the risk of loss to repute, and a sure amount of pain and vexation, that man, if the groan reached him in its forlornness, would be Thomas Carlyle."<sup>13</sup>

It was in "Leigh Hunt's Journal,"—a short-lived Weekly Miscellany (1850—1851)—that Carlyle's sketch, entitled "Two Hundred and Fifty Years Ago,"<sup>14</sup> first appeared.

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<sup>13</sup> "Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, with Reminiscences of friends and Contemporaries." (Lond. 1850.)

<sup>14</sup> "Two Hundred and Fifty Years Ago. From a waste paper bag of T. Carlyle." Reprinted in Carlyle's Miscellanies, Ed. 1857.

It was during his residence at Craigenputtoch that "Sartor Resartus" ("The Tailor Done Over," the name of an old Scotch ballad) was written, which, after being rejected by several publishers, finally made its appearance in "Eraser's Magazine," 1833—34. The book, it must be confessed, might well have puzzled the critical gentlemen—the "book-tasters"—who decide for publishers what work to print among those submitted in manuscript. It is a sort of philosophical romance, in which the author undertakes to give, in the form of a review of a German work on dress, and in a notice of the life of the writer, his own opinions upon matters and things in general. The hero, Professor Teufelsdröckh ("Devil's Dirt"), seems to be intended for a portrait of human nature as affected by the moral influence to which a cultivated mind would be exposed by the transcendental philosophy of Fichte. Mr. Carlyle works out his theory—the clothes philosophy—and finds the world false and hollow, our institutions mere worn-out rags or disguises, and that our only safety lies in flying from falsehood to truth, and becoming in harmony with the "divine idea." There is much fanciful, grotesque description in "Sartor," with deep thought and beautiful imagery. "In this book," wrote John Sterling, "we always feel that there is a mystic influence around us, bringing out into sharp homely clearness what is noblest in the remote and infinite, exalting into wonder what is commonest in the dust and toil of every day."

"Sartor" found but few admirers; those readers, however, were

firm and enthusiastic in their applause. In 1838 the "Sartor Resartus" papers, already republished in the United States, were issued in a collected form here; and in 1839-1840 his various scattered articles in periodicals, after having similarly received the honour of republication in America, were published here, first in four and afterwards in five volumes, under the title of "Miscellanies."

It was in the spring of 1837 that Carlyle's first great historical work appeared, "The French Revolution:—Vol. I., The Bastille; Vol. II, The Constitution; Vol. III., The Guillotine." The publication of this book produced a profound impression on the public mind. A history abounding in vivid and graphic descriptions, it was at the same time a gorgeous "prose epic." It is perhaps the most readable of all Carlyle's works, and indeed is one of the most remarkable books of the age. There is no other account of the French Revolution that can be compared with it for intensity of feeling and profoundness of thought.

A great deal of information respecting Carlyle's manner of living and personal history during these earlier years in London may be gleaned incidentally from his "Life of John Sterling," a book, which, from the nature of it, is necessarily partly autobiographical.

Thomas Moore and others met him sometimes in London society at this time. Moore thus briefly chronicles a breakfast at Lord Houghton's, at which Carlyle was present:—

"22nd May, 1838.—Breakfasted at Milnes', and met rather

a remarkable party, consisting of Savage, Landor, and Carlyle (neither of whom I had ever seen before), Robinson, Rogers, and Rice. A good deal of conversation between Robinson and Carlyle about German authors, of whom I knew nothing, nor (from what they paraded of them) felt that I had lost much by my ignorance."<sup>15</sup>

In 1835, after the publication of "Sartor Resartus," Carlyle received an invitation from some American admirers of his writings, to visit their country, and he contemplated doing so, but his labours in examining and collecting materials for his great work on "The French Revolution," then hastening towards completion, prevented him.

We may say that, for many reasons, it is to be regretted that this design was never carried into execution. Had Carlyle witnessed with his own eyes the admirable working of democratic institutions in the United States, he might have done more justice to our Transatlantic brethren, who were always his first and foremost admirers, and he might also have acquired more faith in the future destinies of his own countrymen.

In December, 1837, Carlyle wrote a very remarkable letter to a correspondent in India, which has never been printed in his works, and which we are enabled to give here entire. It is addressed to Major David Lester Richardson, in acknowledgment of his "Literary Leaves, or Prose and Verse," published at Calcutta in 1836. These "Literary Leaves" contain

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<sup>15</sup> Diary of Thomas Moore. (Lond. 1856.) Vol. vii., p. 224

among other things an article on the Italian Opera (taking much the same view of it as Carlyle does), and a sketch of Edward Irving. These papers no doubt pleased Carlyle, and perhaps led him to entertain a rather exaggeratedly high opinion of the rest of the book.

**THOMAS CARLYLE TO DAVID LESTER  
RICHARDSON.**

"5, Cheyne Row, Chelsea, London, "*19th December*, 1837.

"My DEAR SIR,

"Your courteous gift, with the letter accompanying it, reached me only about a week ago, though dated 20th of June, almost at the opposite point of the year. Whether there has been undue delay or not is unknown to me, but at any rate on my side there ought to be no delay.

"I have read your volume—what little of it was known to me before, and the much that was not known—I can say, with true pleasure. It is written, as few volumes in these days are, with fidelity, with successful care, with insight and conviction as to matter, with clearness and graceful precision as to manner: in a word, it is the impress of a mind stored with elegant accomplishments, gifted with an eye to see, and a heart to understand; a welcome, altogether recommendable book. More than once I have said to myself and others, How many parlour firesides are there this winter in England, at which this volume, could one give credible announcement of its quality, would be right pleasant company? There are very many, *could* one give

the announcement: but no such announcement *can* be given; therefore the parlour firesides must even put up with – or what other stuff chance shovels in their way, and read, though with malediction all the time. It is a great pity, but no man can help it. We are now arrived seemingly pretty near the point when all criticism and proclamation in matters literary has degenerated into an inane jargon, incredible, unintelligible, inarticulate as the cawing of choughs and rooks; and many things in that as in other provinces, are in a state of painful and rapid transition. A good book has no way of recommending itself except slowly and as it were accidentally from hand to hand. The man that wrote it must abide his time. He needs, as indeed all men do, the *faith* that this world is built not on falsehood and jargon but on truth and reason; that no good thing done by any creature of God was, is, or ever can be *lost*, but will verily do the service appointed for it, and be found among the general sum-total and all of things after long times, nay after all time, and through eternity itself. Let him 'cast his bread upon the waters,' therefore, cheerful of heart; 'he will find it after many days.'

"I know not why I write all this to you; it comes very spontaneously from me. Let it be your satisfaction, the highest a man can have in this world, that the talent entrusted to you did not lie useless, but was turned to account, and proved itself to be a talent; and the 'publishing world' can receive it altogether according to their own pleasure, raise it high on the housetops, or trample it low into the street-kennels; that is not the question at

all, the *thing* remains precisely what it was after never such raising and never such depressing and trampling, there is no change whatever in *it*. I bid you go on, and prosper.

"One thing grieves me: the tone of sadness, I might say of settled melancholy that runs through all your utterances of yourself. It is not right, it is wrong; and yet how shall I reprove you? If you knew me, you would triumphantly<sup>16</sup> for any spiritual endowment bestowed on a man, that it is accompanied, or one might say *preceded* as the first origin of it, always by a delicacy of organisation which in a world like ours is sure to have itself manifoldly afflicted, tormented, darkened down into sorrow and disease. You feel yourself an exile, in the East; but in the West too it is exile; I know not where under the sun it is not exile. Here in the Fog Babylon, amid mud and smoke, in the infinite din of 'vociferous platitude,' and quack outbellowing quack, with truth and pity on all hands ground under the wheels, can one call it a home, or a world? It is a waste chaos, where we have to swim painfully for our life. The utmost a man can do is to swim there like a man, and hold his peace. For this seems to me a great truth, in any exile or chaos whatsoever, that sorrow was not given us for sorrow's sake, but always and infallibly as a lesson to us from which we are to learn somewhat: and which, the somewhat once *learned*, ceases to be sorrow. I do believe this; and study in general to 'consume my own smoke,' not indeed without very ugly out-puffs at times! Allan Cunningham is the best, he tells me

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<sup>16</sup> There seems to be some omission or slip of the pen here.

that always as one grows older, one grows happier: a thing also which I really can believe. But as for you, my dear sir, you have other work to do in the East than grieve. Are there not beautiful things there, glorious things; wanting only an eye to note them, a hand to record them? If I had the command over you, I would say, read *Paul et Virginie*, then read the *Chaumière Indienne*; gird yourself together for a right effort, and go and do likewise or better! I mean what I say. The East has its own phases, there are things there which the West yet knows not of; and one heaven covers both. He that has an eye let him look!

"I hope you forgive me this style I have got into. It seems to me on reading your book as if we had been long acquainted in some measure; as if one might speak to you right from the heart. I hope we shall meet some day or other. I send you my constant respect and good wishes; and am and remain,

"Yours very truly always,

**"T. CARLYLE."**

Carlyle first appeared as a lecturer in 1837. His first course was on 'German Literature,' at Willis's Rooms; a series of six lectures, of which the first was thus noticed in the *Spectator* of Saturday, May 6, 1837.<sup>17</sup>

*"Mr. Thomas Carlyle's Lectures.*

"Mr. Carlyle delivered the first of a course of lectures on German Literature, at Willis's Rooms, on Tuesday, to a very crowded and yet a select audience of both sexes. Mr. Carlyle may

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<sup>17</sup> Facsimiled in "The Autographic Mirror," July, 1865.



be deficient in the mere mechanism of oratory; but this minor defect is far more than counterbalanced by his perfect mastery of his subject, the originality of his manner, the perspicuity of his language, his simple but genuine eloquence, and his vigorous grasp of a large and difficult question. No person of taste or judgment could hear him without feeling that the lecturer is a man of genius, deeply imbued with his great argument."

"This course of lectures," says a writer already quoted, "was well attended by the fashionables of the West End; and though they saw in his manner something exceedingly awkward, they could not fail to discern in his matter the impress of a mind of great originality and superior gifts."<sup>18</sup>

The following year he delivered a second course on the 'History of Literature, or the Successive Periods of European Culture,' at the Literary Institution in Edwards-street, Portman-square. 'The Revolutions of Modern Europe' was the title given to the third course, delivered twelve months later. The fourth and last series, of six lectures, is the best remembered, 'Heroes and Hero-worship.' This course alone was published, and it became more immediately popular than any of the works which had preceded it. Concerning these lectures, Leigh Hunt remarked that it seemed "as if some Puritan had come to life again, liberalized by German philosophy and his own intense reflections and experience." Another critic, a Scotch writer, could see nothing but wild impracticability in them,

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<sup>18</sup> JAMES GRANT: "Portraits of Public Characters." (Lond. 1841.) Vol. ii., p. 152.

and exclaimed, "Can any living man point to a single practical passage in any of these lectures? If not, what is the real value of Mr. Carlyle's teachings? What is Mr. Carlyle himself but a phantasm!"

The vein of Puritanism running through his writings, composed upon the model of the German school, impressed many critics with the belief that their author, although full of fire and energy, was perplexed and embarrassed with his own speculations. Concerning this Puritan element in his reflections, Mr. James Hannay remarks, "That earnestness, that grim humour—that queer, half-sarcastic, half-sympathetic fun—is quite Scotch. It appears in Knox and Buchanan, and it appears in Burns. I was not surprised when a school-fellow of Carlyle's told me that his favourite poem was, when a boy, 'Death and Doctor Hornbook.' And if I were asked to explain this originality, I should say that he was a covenanter coming in the wake of the eighteenth century and the transcendental philosophy. He has gone into the hills against 'shams,' as they did against Prelacy, Erastianism, and so forth. But he lives in a quieter age, and in a literary position. So he can give play to the humour which existed in them as well, and he overflows with a range of reading and speculation to which they were necessarily strangers."

'Chartism,' published in 1839, and which, to use the words of a critic of the time, was the publication in which "he first broke ground on the Condition of England question," appeared a short time before the lectures on 'Heroes and Hero-worship' were

delivered. If we remember rightly, Mr. Carlyle gave forth "those grand utterances" extemporaneously and without an abstract, notes, or a reminder of any kind—utterances not beautiful to the flunkey-mind, or valet-soul, occupied mainly with the fold of the hero's necktie, and the cut of his coat. Flunkey-dom, by one of its mouthpieces, thus speaks of them:—

"Perhaps his course for the present year, which was on Hero-worship, was better attended than any previous one. Some of those who were present estimated the average attendance at three hundred. They chiefly consisted of persons of rank and wealth, as the number of carriages which each day waited the conclusion of the lecture to receive Mr. Carlyle's auditors, and to carry them to their homes, conclusively testified. The locality of Mr. Carlyle's lectures has, I believe, varied every year. The Hanover Rooms, Willis's Rooms, and a place in the north of London, the name of which I forget, have severally been chosen as the place whence to give utterance to his profound and original trains of thought.

"A few words will be expected here as to Mr. Carlyle's manner as a lecturer. In so far as his mere manner is concerned, I can scarcely bestow on him a word of commendation. There is something in his manner which, if I may use a rather quaint term, must seem very uncouth to London audiences of the most respectable class, *accustomed as they are to the polished deportment*<sup>19</sup> *which is usually exhibited in Willis's or the Hanover Rooms*. When he enters the room, and proceeds to the sort of

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<sup>19</sup> Shade of Mr. Turveydrop senior, hear this man!

rostrum whence he delivers his lectures, he is, according to the usual practice in such cases, generally received with applause; but he very rarely takes any more notice of the mark of approbation thus bestowed upon him, than if he were altogether unconscious of it. And the same seeming want of respect for his audience, or, at any rate, the same disregard for what I believe he considers the troublesome forms of politeness, is visible at the commencement of his lecture. Having ascended his desk, he gives a hearty rub to his hands, and plunges at once into his subject. He reads very closely, which, indeed, must be expected, considering the nature of the topics which he undertakes to discuss. He is not prodigal of gesture with his arms or body; but there is something in his eye and countenance which indicates great earnestness of purpose, and the most intense interest in his subject. *You can almost fancy, in some of his more enthusiastic and energetic moments, that you see his inmost soul in his face.* At times, indeed very often, he so unnaturally distorts his features, as to give to his countenance a very unpleasant expression. On such occasions, you would imagine that he was suddenly seized with some violent paroxysms of pain. *He is one of the most ungraceful speakers I have ever heard address a public assemblage of persons.* In addition to the awkwardness of his general manner, he 'makes mouths,' which would of themselves be sufficient to mar the agreeableness of his delivery. And his manner of speaking, and the ungracefulness of his gesticulation, are greatly aggravated by his strong Scotch accent. Even to the generality of Scotchmen his

pronunciation is harsh in no ordinary degree. Need I say, then, what it must be to an English ear?

"I was present some months ago, during the delivery of a speech by Mr. Carlyle at a meeting held in the Freemasons' Tavern, for the purpose of forming a metropolitan library; and though that speech did not occupy in its delivery more than five minutes, he made use of some of the most extraordinary phraseology I ever heard employed by a human being. He made use of the expression 'this London,' which he pronounced 'this Loondun,' four or five times—a phrase which grated grievously on the ears even of those of Mr. Carlyle's own countrymen who were present, and which must have sounded doubly harsh in the ears of an Englishman, considering the singularly broad Scotch accent with which he spoke.

"A good deal of uncertainty exists as to Mr. Carlyle's religious opinions. I have heard him represented as a firm and entire believer in revelation, and I have heard it affirmed with equal confidence that he is a decided Deist. My own impression is," &c.<sup>20</sup>

In 1841 Carlyle superintended the publication of the English edition of his friend Emerson's *Essays*,<sup>21</sup> to which he prefixed a characteristic Preface of some length.

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<sup>20</sup> "Portraits of Public Characters," by the author of "Random Recollections of the Lords and Commons." Vol. ii. pp. 152-158.

<sup>21</sup> *Essays*: by R.W. Emerson, of Concord, Massachusetts. With Preface by Thomas Carlyle. London: James Fraser, 1841.

"The name of Ralph Waldo Emerson," he writes, "is not entirely new in England: distinguished travellers bring us tidings of such a man; fractions of his writings have found their way into the hands of the curious here; fitful hints that there is, in New England, some spiritual notability called Emerson, glide through Reviews and Magazines. Whether these hints were true or not true, readers are now to judge for themselves a little better.

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