

**ESSAYS
ON GOETHE**

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Essays on Goethe by Thomas Carlyle

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THOMAS CARLYLE

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CARLYLE'S HOUSE,
24, CHEYNE ROW, CHELSEA.

ESSAYS ON GOETHE

BY
THOMAS CARLYLE

With an Introduction by
HENRY MORLEY

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INTRODUCTION.

THOMAS CARLYLE, at the outset of his career as a writer, had a faith in Goethe which brought him into correspondence with that greatest of the German poets. While in doubt as to the shaping of his future career, he looked to Goethe for counsel with such trust as no other man inspired; and in his earlier writings in the *Edinburgh Review* he set forth to English readers the grounds of his admiration with an insight for which the poet himself was grateful. For, till Carlyle had taught them better, the English recognised in Goethe no more than a sentimental author of "The Sorrows of Werter," and the author of "Faust," which they understood no better than to see in it a Byronic Mephistopheles. The essays here reprinted as a distinct group, first taught readers in England to appreciate in some degree the breadth of Goethe's range of power, and to sound depths in him that were below the surface of their own imagining.

Goethe died, at an age that had passed fourscore, in the year before Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus" began to appear in *Fraser's Magazine*; and the last piece in this volume, written in 1832, upon the death of Goethe, was sent to Jeffrey from Craigenputtock, two years before Carlyle and his wife settled in London for the rest of their lives at No. 5, (now 24), Cheyne Row.

Thomas Carlyle was born on the 4th of December, 1795, at Ecclefechan, in Dumfriesshire. His father was a stonemason, and his mother had been a maid-servant. At ten years old Carlyle was placed under Adam Hope, at Annan School, the "Hinterschlag Gymnasium" of "Sartor Resartus." At fourteen he was sent to the University of Edinburgh to be trained for the ministry. He took no degree there. At nineteen he obtained, by competition at Dumfries, the post of mathematical master in the Annan Academy, where he earned £60 or £70 a year, that enabled him to relieve his father of further payments for his training as a divinity student. Afterwards, when his friend Edward Irving was rebelled against, for his severity as a schoolmaster, by many of the parents of the children of Kirkecaldy, it was resolved to revive the Kirkecaldy parish school, and professors of the University of Edinburgh were asked to recommend a master for it. They recommended Carlyle, and the rival teachers were good friends together there until 1818, when Carlyle was twenty-three years old, and they both went back to Edinburgh. There Thomas Carlyle put away definitely all thought of entering the Scottish Church, and sought to earn by his pen, deriving part of his little income from the writing of articles for Brewster's *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*.

In 1823, at the age of twenty-eight, Carlyle was first introduced to Jane Welsh, his future wife, by Edward Irving, whose pupil she had been in her girlhood. Her father was dead, and she was living with her mother. A house and land at Craigenputtock formed part of their little property.

In 1822 Carlyle had contributed to a *New Edinburgh Review* a paper on Goethe's "Faust," Goethe thus being his first topic as a reviewer. While at Kirkcaldy he had translated Legendre's "Geometry," and the translation was published in 1824. He was earning then, for a short time, £200 a year at Edinburgh as tutor to young Charles Buller. In 1823 and 1824—from October, 1823—his "Life of Schiller" was appearing in the *London Magazine*, and in 1824 he published his translation of Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister," which was praised and abused, and so brought the translator into notice. The "Life of Schiller" was published as a volume in 1825. When it was afterwards translated into German, Goethe himself wrote a preface to it, and gave some account of the young English author who had done more than any man to make German literature truly understood in England.

In 1826 Carlyle married Jane Welsh, and about the same time an introduction from Bryan Waller Procter ("Barry Cornwall") obtained for him the friendship of Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. In 1827 Carlyle published "Specimens of German Romance." In 1828, when his age was thirty-three, Carlyle and his wife went to live on the wife's property at Craigenputtock, where his chief income as a writer was drawn from his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*. Among the earliest essays are the two upon Goethe, which are here followed by the paper written when news came of Goethe's death.

This little book, then, represents Carlyle at the very outset of his career as a writer. He was strongly

influenced by his delight in German literature, which had then reached its time of greatest power. His style, which never lost the marks of German hands, was affected most, perhaps, by Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, upon whom, also in 1828, he wrote an essay containing some passages that might be applied now to Carlyle himself. But he had felt in its full force the strength of Goethe, to whom he was drawn more than to any other man at any other time. Carlyle was, in his correspondence with Goethe, sitting at the Master's feet, and confiding to him the doubts, struggles, and hopes in his own mind, that preceded his final resolve that he would earn his bread as a man of letters. The resolve was that, as a writer, he would labour only to assert the highest truth of which he was assured. So he began, as he said, to "prophesy"; wrote "Sartor Resartus" in the solitudes of Craigenputtock; and then pitched his tent in the great city, where he did not prophesy in vain, because the truth in him was recognised, and he, being dead, speaks yet and is gladly heard.

H. M.