

**ON THE CHOICE OF BOOKS. THE  
INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF  
THOMAS CARLYLE, LORD  
RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF  
EDINBURGH**

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On the Choice of Books. The Inaugural Address of Thomas Carlyle, Lord Rector of the University of Edinburgh by Thomas Carlyle

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• PORTRAITS OF CARLYLE.

1837—1866.



*A. D'Orsay  
fecit*



*Yours very truly always  
T. Carlyle.*

[The upper Portrait is from a sketch by Count D'Orsay, taken soon after the publication of "Sartor Resartus," in 1837. That beneath is from a recent likeness taken by a friend.]

ON THE  
CHOICE OF BOOKS.

The Inaugural Address  
OF  
THOMAS CARLYLE,  
LORD RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

REPRINTED FROM "THE TIMES,"  
WITH ADDITIONAL ARTICLES, A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,  
AND TWO PORTRAITS.



No. 5, Great Cheyne Row, Chelsea,  
THE RESIDENCE OF MR. CARLYLE SINCE 1834.

LONDON:  
JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN, PICCADILLY.

1866.

270. g 84.

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## PRELIMINARY.

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THE general belief that Carlyle is a gloomy misanthrope, scarcely ever seen outside his own door, is quite an error. Like Thackeray—and, indeed, most other sensible authors—he has no disinclination to accept an invitation to a good dinner. Only a few nights ago, he was the guest of the fashionable young officers on guard at St. James's Palace, who were delighted at having the great man amongst them—and in full talk, too. It was not like any ordinary conversation—says one that was present—it was as if the speaker was giving a long recitation from some favourite book—an essay, a philosophical poem thrown into prose—and experienced a tranquil, steady pleasure from the recital. He touched upon his best-beloved topics, and held forth their excellencies, as some ancient philosopher might have done when moving amongst his scholars in those early schools of the classic period, which have been imagined in the designs of the old masters. Carlyle's conversation is, perhaps, the best living representation of Coleridge's style and manner.

He has, however, a strong dislike to make himself conspicuous in any way. In his own neighbourhood of Chelsea he is never known to take part in public affairs, parochial or otherwise. He has, in short, a horror of the stump and the "Vestry Hall." The suburb, however, has evidently attractions for him of a peculiar



kind. Leigh Hunt's removal to Chelsea was owing to him, as all readers of Hunt's correspondence will remember. Hunt lived in Upper Cheyne Row, within a stone's throw of his illustrious friend; and many were the visits between the two houses—Carlyle being always ready to step in when any of those little difficulties about the water-rate or the butcher's bill, which "vex the poet's mind," required the prompt assistance of a friend, whose motto was, *bis dat qui cito dat*. Retired as is Carlyle's life, his gaunt figure, attired in a brown coat, and dark horn buttons, and with a large slouched felt hat, is familiar enough to Chelsea people. Nor will the denizens of that historico-literary locality let him pass quite so unnoticed as he would desire. Already a sort of pre-posthumous fame has gathered about him; and the gentleman who wrote the life of Turner, and collected so much about that immortal genius from Chelsea folks, would find Chelsea no less fruitful of anecdote about Carlyle. There they tell how the great author of "Hero Worship" one day found himself without threepence to pay a fare, and how an irreverent omnibus conductor, having evidently strong doubts of his character, deputed a sharp newspaper boy to accompany him to the address he had given, and see "all was right;" and how the boy was interrogated by the philosopher with "Weel, cawn ye read?" and so forth; and found him "a very nice man," and hastened to the omnibus conductor to communicate the fact, that the supposed cheat was "a gentleman, and really did live in Great Cheyne Row," as he had solemnly alleged.

Carlyle always walks at night, carrying an enormous stick, and generally with his eyes on the ground.

When he is in London any one may be sure of meeting him in some of the dark streets of that locality about midnight, taking his constitutional walk before retiring to bed—a custom which he continued all through the “garrotting” panic, in spite of warnings of friends that the history of Frederick the Great might one day be brought to a stop before the completion of the last volume. Probably the philosopher was quite willing to trust to his knotted stick, although walking alone, as is his invariable custom. Occasionally he may be seen on horseback; and the good Chelsea folks, whom the philosopher will doubtless pardon for a little excess of that form of “hero-worship” which delights in accumulating details about “living celebrities,” tell how he grooms his own horse, keeping it in a stable on an odd piece of waste ground among donkeys, cows, and geese, who have also their abodes there, and from the crazy gateway of which he issues forth, always unattended, sitting erect in the saddle, like a skeleton guardsman. His solitary habits, however, are not altogether unbroken. Though it is rare indeed that he is ever seen to stop and speak to a grown person in the street—probably because he knows but one or two personally in his own neighbourhood—he is always ready to recognise little children. The keeper of a small confectioner’s shop near the river-side tells with delight how he will call upon her for extravagant quantities of cheap sweetmeats, with which he will sometimes stop and load the laps of a little group of poor children in some of the purlieus of Lawrence-street—that locality once hallowed by the presence of Smollett, Toland, and Budgell—but now, alas! sadly fallen from its old gentility.

Some popular anecdotes of him, however, are not, it must be confessed, of so genial a character. Mr. Babbage himself is not more sensitive to street noises, for which reason—this was before the days of Mr. Bass's bill—our philosopher would often be seen to rush out without his hat to offer the proprietor of a dreadful organ a bribe; failing which he would seize the outlandish offender by the coat collar and forcibly deposit him, instrument and all, at the door of a neighbouring literary man, who had rendered himself conspicuous by defending the organ-grinding nuisance in the public press. Equally famous in that locality is his hatred of fowls and their noise: a neighbour's fowls having, as he once complained, succeeded in banishing him to an upper garret, because, as he said in his peculiar broad Doric, "they would neither hatch in peace, nor let him." Generally, however, the philosopher and historian's friends may be glad to know that he enjoys a degree of retirement and seclusion not easily to be found in the suburbs of the metropolis. The street in which he resides is silent, deserted, and antique. A large garden, fit for philosophic meditation, and enclosed in fine old red brick walls—strangely neglected, by the way, and exhibiting all the "rank luxuriance" of the jungle—lies at the back of the house, where "rumours of the outward world" rarely reach him; and where, we hope, we may be pardoned for this brief, but not irreverent glance at the far-famed Lord Rector of the University of Edinburgh.

JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN.

PICCADILLY, 6th April, 1866.