

**ENGLISH MEN OF
LETTERS.
THOMAS CARLYLE**

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English Men of Letters. Thomas Carlyle by John Nichol & John Morley

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JOHN NICHOL & JOHN MORLEY

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EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

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Lc.

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E.V.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE following record of the leading events of Carlyle's life and attempt to estimate his genius rely on frequently renewed study of his work, on slight personal impressions—"vidi tantum"—and on information supplied by previous narrators. Of these the great author's chosen literary legatee is the most eminent and, in the main, the most reliable. Every critic of Carlyle must admit as constant obligations to Mr. Froude as every critic of Byron to Moore or of Scott to Lockhart. The works of these masters in biography remain the ample storehouses from which every student will continue to draw. Each has, in a sense, made his subject his own, and each has been similarly arraigned.

I must here be allowed to express a feeling akin to indignation at the persistent, often virulent, attacks directed against a loyal friend, betrayed, it may be, by excess of faith and the defective reticence that often belongs to genius, to publish too much about his hero. But Mr. Froude's quotation, in defence, from the essay on *Sir Walter Scott* requires no supplement: it should be remembered that he acted with explicit authority; that the restrictions under which he was at first entrusted with the MSS. of the *Reminiscences* and the *Letters and Memorials* (annotated by Carlyle himself, as if for publication) were

withdrawn ; and that the initial permission to select finally approached a practical injunction to communicate the whole. The worst that can be said is that, in the last years of Carlyle's career, his own judgment as to what should be made public of the details of his domestic life may have been somewhat obscured ; but, if so, it was a weakness easily hidden from a devotee.

My acknowledgments are due to several of the Press comments which appeared shortly after Carlyle's death, more especially that of the *St. James's Gazette*, giving the most philosophical brief summary of his religious views which I have seen ; and to the kindness of Dr. Eugene Oswald, President of the Carlyle Society, in supplying me with valuable hints on matters relating to German History and Literature. I have also to thank the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian* for permitting me to reproduce the substance of my article in its columns of February 1881. That article was largely based on a contribution on the same subject, in 1859, to Mackenzie's *Imperial Dictionary of Biography*.

I may add that in the distribution of material over the comparatively short space at my command, I have endeavoured to give prominence to facts less generally known, and passed over slightly the details of events previously enlarged on, as the terrible accident to Mrs. Carlyle and the incidents of her death. To her inner history I have only referred in so far as it had a direct bearing on her husband's life. As regards the itinerary of Carlyle's foreign journeys, it has seemed to me that it might be of interest to those travelling in Germany to have a short record of the places where the author sought his "studies" for his greatest work.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY	1

CHAPTER II

1795-1826

ECCLEFECHAN AND EDINBURGH	18
-------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III

1826-1834

CRAIGENPUTOCK—(from Marriage to London)	42
---	----

CHAPTER IV

1834-1842

CHEYNE ROW—(To death of Mrs. Welsh)	63
---	----

CHAPTER V

1842-1853

CHEYNE ROW—(To death of Carlyle's Mother)	87
---	----

CHAPTER VI

1853-1866

	PAGE
THE MINOTAUR—(To death of Mrs. Carlyle)	114

CHAPTER VII

1866-1881

DECADENCE	136
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII

CARLYLE AS MAN OF LETTERS, CRITIC, AND HISTORIAN	161
--	-----

CHAPTER IX

CARLYLE'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY	188
--	-----

CHAPTER X

ETHICS—PREDECESSORS—INFLUENCE	214
---	-----

APPENDIX—

ON CARLYLE'S RELIGION	246
---------------------------------	-----

INDEX	249
-----------------	-----

THOMAS CARLYLE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

FOUR SCOTSMEN, born within the limits of the same hundred years, all in the first rank of writers, if not of thinkers, represent much of the spirit of four successive generations. They are leading links in an intellectual chain.

DAVID HUME (1711-1776) remains the most salient type in our island of the scepticism, half conservative, half destructive, but never revolutionary, which marked the third quarter of the eighteenth century. He had some points of intellectual contact with Voltaire, though substituting a staid temper and passionless logic for the incisive brilliancy of a mocking Mercury ; he had no relation, save an unhappy personal one, to Rousseau.

ROBERT BURNS (1759-1796), last of great lyrists inspired by a local genius, keenest of popular satirists, narrative poet of the people, spokesman of their higher as of their lower natures, stood on the verge between two eras. Half