

**READINGS FROM
CARLYLE: SELECTED
AND EDITED**

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Readings from Carlyle: Selected and Edited by Thomas Carlyle & W. Keith Leask

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THOMAS CARLYLE & W. KEITH LEASK

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THOMAS CARLYLE

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47
SELECTED AND EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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PREFACE.

THE present attempt to render Carlyle accessible to schools seems naturally to require some few words of introduction. It has not been thought desirable to reduce the great writer by any method of simplification to the capacity of the lowest, as, by so doing, he would inevitably disappear. His manner and matter are inseparable. Nor, indeed, was it necessary; for Carlyle has the faculty of making his meaning plain, though the staple of his thinking may *at first* be above the capacity of that class of readers for whom this work is intended. Boys, however, will be benefited by attempting the great books resolutely and directly, rather than by any mistaken and laborious policy of approaching them through *Introductions* and *Primers*.

It is believed that the central and cardinal doctrines of Carlyle will cause no difficulty to a class, when carefully mastered and presented by the teacher.

The other ideas of Carlyle—Man's chief end, his duties, his rights, the unity of history—may not be to even the highest classes the work of a day. Rome was not built in a day, and no *Roady Reckoner* in history, or religion, or morals, has yet been given to man. $\chi\alpha\lambda\epsilon\rho\acute{\alpha}\ \rho\acute{\alpha}\ \kappa\alpha\lambda\delta$. But the labour thus bestowed on the great things of life, the great men, the great ideas, and the great books, will not be lost, least of all when the writings of Carlyle are concerned. Carlyle is a man well qualified to speak for himself; with this conviction the notes and elucidations at the end are of the briefest, the books recommended and mentioned being such as to be within general reach.

The task of selection has been one of no slight difficulty. Carlyle is not a writer who lends himself readily to extracts, and many great passages have been omitted through their entailing a reference to matters which would have required for the barest explanation a long analysis of the book in which they appear.

The intrinsic difficulties of his style, and the great range of his literary allusiveness, so much beyond most boys, have been an additional element of trouble. No pains, however, have been spared to present Carlyle as a whole and in his more salient features.

The passages from *Sartor* will throw light on his life; *Past and Present* shows the politician discussing problems never more debated than now, and that, too, by his influence almost in his own words and phrases; *Hero-Worship* is Carlyle in his most familiar aspect of the practical moralist; the historian is found in the extracts from *Cromwell* and the *French Revolution*. From first to last it will be seen he is a man of one mould and of one piece. But he has many faces, and it has been attempted to show Carlyle as the man, the writer, the politician, the literary critic, the essayist, moralist, and historian. The notes, though brief, have been made with care, and are, it is hoped, pertinent and really explanatory of the text.

The best thanks of both writer and publisher are due to Messrs. Chapman and Hall for their ready and courteous permission to make use of the entire Copyright of Carlyle for this work.

W. K. L.

ABERDEEN,

August, 1894.

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LIFE OF CARLYLE

THOMAS CARLYLE was born at Ecclefechan, in Annandale, in the county of Dumfries, on December 4th, 1795, and was the eldest of nine children. His early education began at the burgh-school of Annan, from which, at the remarkably early age of fourteen, he proceeded to the University of Edinburgh, entering the town on November 9th, 1809, and retaining to the last the most vivid recollection of his impressions of the most picturesque of European capitals. He seems to have entertained great expectations from the University; but it was the period at which the national educational institutions both of England and of Scotland had reached their lowest point, and his disappointment he has left on record in one of the most familiar pages of his *Sartor*. Perhaps his own youth had something to do with this, for some of the professors at the time were men of mark—Christison filling the Chair of Latin, and Dunbar of Greek, Playfair of Natural Philosophy, and Leslie of Mathematics. Of the last, he ever continued to speak with very great respect, and his proficiency in mathematics was early marked, and will strike the reader at every stage of his writings. Strong as was his subsequent bent towards philosophy and metaphysics, he does not seem at this time to have devoted any attention to their study, though Brown was a most able lecturer. His acquaintance with Latin was, however, considerable, while his knowledge of Greek was almost a blank, and with Sir Walter Scott he remains a very curious example of a great writer whose thinking and fibre were in all essential respects of a markedly Latin character.

Carlyle had entered the University with the intention of becoming a minister of the Church of Scotland; but, relinquishing the idea, he accepted in 1814 the post of Mathematical Master at Annan, and from that he removed in 1816 to Kirkcaldy, where he met with Edward Irving, whose influence upon him was destined to be so remarkable. Their long walks and discussions by the sea-beach, and the attractiveness and freshness of Irving's character, constitute one of the most

Teaches at
Annan and
Kirkcaldy.

formative elements in the development of Carlyle, who nobly repaid the debt to his dead friend in the eloquent tribute to his memory that will be found in this volume. Experience, however, had convinced him that neither in the Church nor in teaching was his vocation to be found; and, returning to Edinburgh with vague prospects of studying law, he found work on the staff of Brewster's *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*, for which he wrote sixteen articles, and, after the manner of his favourite Dr. Johnson, browsed omnivorously on the books in the Advocates' Library.

The influence of German Literature had been spreading in Britain. Readers of Lockhart's *Life of Scott* will remember Sir Walter's account of his own early version in 1796 of Bürger's *Lenore*, and the rise in the literary firmament of new stars, philosophical and poetical, as they presented themselves to the view of the writers of the time. Carlyle had learned German in order to be able to read books on mineralogy, and speedily discovered the power of the school. Indeed, his essays on Goethe, Richter, Schiller—whose influence he seems to have rather over-estimated—and upon German literature generally, remain yet the best introduction to a subject upon which so much has been written. The influence of these three writers, along with that of Fichte, remained with him to the close, and will be duly indicated in its place. From Goethe he learned his whole literary attitude; from Fichte his conception of the world of sense as being but the mere veil of the unseen, but spiritually perceived, universe; and from Richter the strong, if not often, indeed, rather boisterous and formless humour that breaks out in the pages of *Sartor Resartus*.

An appointment in 1822 as tutor to the family of Mr. Buller detained him for two years more in Edinburgh, and in the same year he translated Legendre's *Geometry*, prefixing to it an essay on Proportion, which such a competent critic as Professor De Morgan pronounced a model of exposition and lucidity, and to which Carlyle referred long after with feelings of lively satisfaction as his first work. "I was," he says, "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 press next week) never seen it since; but I still 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 bit of

Translates
Legendre's
"Geometry."