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Edited by Henry Duff Traill

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The Works of Thomas Carlyle

VOLUME 25:
THE LIFE OF FRIEDRICH SCHILLER
COMPREHENDING AN EXAMINATION
OF HIS WORKS

EDITED BY HENRY DUFF TRAILL



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CENTENARY EDITION

—
THE WORKS OF
THOMAS CARLYLE
IN THIRTY VOLUMES

—
VOL. XXV

THE LIFE OF
FRIEDRICH SCHILLER

Cambridge University Press

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Goetz im Jng. Schiller.

*From a Miniature in the Possession of the Hoflame Fräulein von Hall, in
Berlin, taken while Schiller lived with the Horners in Dresden.*

London, Chapman & Hall.

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THOMAS CARLYLE

THE LIFE OF

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER

COMPREHENDING AN

EXAMINATION OF HIS WORKS

Quique pii vates et Phoëbo digna locuti.
—VIRGIL

IN ONE VOLUME

LONDON
CHAPMAN AND HALL
LIMITED
1899

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INTRODUCTION

THE *Life of Schiller* is one of those early works of Carlyle which, though written before the development of what may be called his 'characteristic' style, and not indeed even foreshadowing it, is nevertheless most interestingly stamped in many places with the unmistakable mark of his individuality as a thinker and critic both of literature and life. It is also one of those works which its author, perhaps because it dated from before the formation of that 'characteristic' style which undoubtedly gave the fullest expression of his genius, was wont to underrate. In the Preface to the Second Edition, published just twenty years after the First, he compares it in terms of humorous disparagement to one of those horses which 'a judicious owner, on fair survey of them, might prefer to adjust by at once shooting through the head.' In the case of books, however, he goes on to remark, that course, 'owing to the pirate species, is not possible'; and the excuse for reprinting 'this somewhat insignificant book' is, that certain parties of the aforesaid species were preparing to print it for him. Since its publication there had been, he adds, 'great changes in our notions, informations, in our relations to the *Life of Schiller*, and to other things connected therewith'; and though this new matter had enabled him to correct a few such errors in the original edition as lay corrigible on the surface, he could not have made full use of it without an absolute rewriting of the entire biography, a task 'that would have been frightful' to him. Hence, he concludes, 'the present little book is very imperfect; but it pretends also to be very harmless. It can innocently instruct those who are more ignorant than itself.'

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This, however, carries depreciation to excess. The new biographical material, though Carlyle's account of the poet might no doubt have been considerably amplified by it, included nothing in any way calculated to modify his conception of Schiller's personal character or his appreciation of Schiller's poetical genius—both the conception and the appreciation remaining as true and as illuminating as ever. And as a matter of fact, the work, so far from having been superseded by subsequent studies, remained, and still remains, one of the most valuable pieces of Carlyle's early work, and on its reprint in the 'People's Edition' he was requested to add sixty or seventy pages to it, an addition which he was enabled to make by the incorporation with it of a translation of Herr Saupe's then recently and most opportunely published little book entitled *Schiller and his Father's Household*. Thus reinforced, the *Life* lacks scarcely any element which the short biography of a great poet—and it is doubtful whether this or any other biography would gain by being much longer—should possess. The gradual growth of Schiller's genius, and the equally gradual determination of his artistic aims, are traced with unerring insight and precision; and the specifically 'literary' criticism—the analyses and critical estimates of the Schillerian drama and poetry, the former especially—reveal an amount both of sympathy and of penetration which the author, one regrets to remember, was too often unable to show in dealing with some of the classics of our own literature. The only blemish—though it must be admitted it is a somewhat serious one—the only deduction which has to be made from the general statement that the book is an entirely worthy study of a great poet, lies in the extraordinary faultiness of the English metrical renderings of the poet's plays. It is, of course, pretty well known to every one acquainted with Carlyle's few attempts at original verse-making that his ear for metre was singularly bad; but *how* bad it was, can, I think, have been realised by no one who has not made a special study of these translations from *Wallenstein* and *The*

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Maid of Orleans. In the latter poem there is a passage of nineteen lines, of which no fewer than nine refuse to scan after any amount of negotiation ; and such amazing attempts at a decasyllable as

That I never had been born. No more

and

Of light dust. Thus man comes to an end.

abound. More distracted prosody was never heard by the ear or tested on the fingers. In a footnote to his criticism of *Wallenstein*, Carlyle speaks in tones of somewhat patronising approval of ‘Mr. Coleridge’s translation of the last two parts of this poem,’ as ‘excepting Sotheby’s *Oberon*, the best, indeed the only sufferable translation from the German with which our literature has been enriched.’ Comically faint praise of a performance—perhaps never since repeated except by Fitzgerald—in which a professed rendering from a foreign poet has grown into a great original work of literature.

But the original matter of the *Life of Schiller* is as strong as the translations are weak. The style, as has been remarked, is not, of course, so complete an expression of the complex and many-sided genius of the writer as it afterwards found in ‘Carlylese’ ; but it is all the better a biographical style, at any rate in this instance, for that. So plain-sailing a story as that of *Schiller’s Life* does not ask to be told by flashes of lightning, like the lurid drama of the *French Revolution*, or those agitating soul-struggles which are recorded for us in *Sartor Resartus*. One is apt to feel that even *Frederick the Great* would have been more readable had the strictly political, if not the military, part of it been written in Carlyle’s ‘early manner,’ and the later style, now inseparably associated with him, had been reserved for those dramatic side-sketches of men and incidents of which the author indicated the episodic and digressive character by changes of the ‘fount’ of type. The style of the *Life of Schiller*—the style to which Carlyle attained apparently in the course of writing it, is for

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historical or biographical purposes excellent. In the earlier parts of the work, we are conscious, here and there, of a certain stiffness and formality quite amusingly at variance with the reckless and lawless diction which he was to put into the mouth of Herr Von Teufelsdröckh; but it is the stateliness of a very good old school, and seems to imply a previous study of models which one would hardly suspect Carlyle of selecting. Such a sentence as this, for instance, is surely significant of recent reading:—

‘But the love of change is grounded on the difference between anticipation and reality, and dwells with man till the age when habit becomes stronger than desire, or anticipation ceases to be hope.’

If that were given at an examination in English Literature, as an unseen passage, the author of which was to be named, it is probable that the name of Samuel Johnson would appear on the papers of many more candidates than would that of Thomas Carlyle. Long, however, before he had reached the end of his work, he had found his way to a medium of expression, on which it may be said that, for the special purposes of this kind, he never improved. Take the peroration of what we may call his funeral eulogium upon his hero:—

‘On the whole, we may pronounce him happy. His days passed in the contemplation of ideal grandeurs, he lived among the glories and solemnities of universal Nature; his thoughts were of sages and heroes, and scenes of elysian beauty. It is true, he had no rest, no peace; but he enjoyed the fiery consciousness of his own activity, which stands in place of it for men like him. It is true, he was long sickly; but did he not even then conceive and body-forth Max Piccolomini, and Thekla, and the Maid of Orleans, and the scenes of *Wilhelm Tell*? It is true, he died early; but the student will exclaim with Charles XII. in another case, “Was it not enough of life when he had conquered kingdoms?” These kingdoms which Schiller conquered were not for one nation at the expense of suffering to another; they were soiled by no patriot’s blood, no widow’s, no orphan’s tear: they are kingdoms conquered from the barren realms of Darkness, to increase the happiness, and dignity, and power, of all men; new forms of Truth, new maxims of Wisdom, new images and scenes of Beauty, won from the ‘void and formless

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Infinite' ; a κτήμα ἐς αἰεῖ, 'a possession forever,' to all the generations of the Earth.

Who can doubt that, even if Carlyle had chosen to abide within the too confining pale—as for him it would have been—of classicism, he would still have given us many a noble piece of English prose?

H. D. TRAILL.

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

[1845]

THE excuse for reprinting this somewhat insignificant Book is, that certain parties, of the pirate species, were preparing to reprint it for me. There are books, as there are horses, which a judicious owner, on fair survey of them, might prefer to adjust by at once shooting through the head: but in the case of books, owing to the pirate species, that is not possible. Remains therefore that at least dirty paper and errors of the press be guarded against; that a poor Book, which has still to walk this world, do walk in clean linen, so to speak, and pass its few and evil days with no blotches but its own adhering to it.

There have been various new *Lives* of Schiller, since this one first saw the light;—great changes in our notions, informations, in our relations to the Life of Schiller, and to other things connected therewith, during that long time! Into which I could not in the least enter on the present occasion. Such errors, one or two, as lay corrigible on the surface, I have pointed out by here and there a Note as I read; but of errors that lay deeper there could no charge be taken: to break the surface, to tear up the old substance, and model *it* anew, was a task that lay far from me,—that would have been frightful to me. What was written remains written; and the Reader, by way of constant commentary, when needed, has to say to himself, ‘It was written Twenty years ago.’ For newer instruction on Schiller’s Biography he can consult the *Schiller’s Leben* of Madame von Wolzogen, which Goethe once called a

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Schiller Redivivus; the *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*; or, as a summary of the whole, and the readiest inlet to the general subject for an English reader, Sir Edward Bulwer's *Sketch of Schiller's Life*, a vigorous and lively piece of writing, prefixed to his *Translations from Schiller*.

The present little Book is very imperfect:—but it pretends also to be very harmless; it can innocently instruct those who are more ignorant than itself! To which ingenuous class, according to their wants and tastes, let it, with all good wishes, and hopes to meet afterwards in fruitfuler provinces, be heartily commended.

T. CARLYLE.

London, 7th May 1845.