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Edited by Henry Duff Traill

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# The Works of Thomas Carlyle

VOLUME 26:  
CRITICAL AND  
MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS I

EDITED BY HENRY DUFF TRAILL



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CENTENARY EDITION  
—————  
THE WORKS OF  
THOMAS CARLYLE  
IN THIRTY VOLUMES  
—————  
VOL. XXVI  
CRITICAL AND  
MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS  
I

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*C. G. Hayne*

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THOMAS CARLYLE

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CRITICAL AND

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS

IN FIVE VOLUMES

VOLUME I

LONDON  
CHAPMAN AND HALL  
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1899

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## INTRODUCTION

WITH the five volumes of *Miscellaneous Essays* of which the first is here presented the Centenary Edition of Carlyle's Works will be complete. And with this collection of his occasional writings it will be worthily closed. The *Miscellaneous Essays*—like most of an author's productions which lie scattered over a considerable tract of time—are of unequal merit and interest: but at their best, and where they belong to their writer's 'best period,' they are, many of them, among the finest of his efforts. Some of them were evidently thrown off at a heat, and at a time when Carlyle's mind was specially exercised on some burning question of the day. And, in this case, their length, that of an ordinary Review article, not being sufficient to exhaust the initial impetus which set them going, we read them from end to end with unabated and unflagging pleasure. Opening one of the volumes of the 1872 Edition, quite at random, I have lighted upon the famous paper contributed by him to the *Foreign Quarterly Review* on that singular figure in South American history, Dr. Francia, the one-while Dictator of Paraguay. Its date is of 1843, and it belongs therefore to the time when Carlyle was at that precise stage in his intellectual and artistic career at which such a subject most powerfully appealed to him, and at which he was able, after his own peculiar fashion, to do it the fullest justice. Both his mind and his style were thoroughly ripe for it. As for his style, it was now at almost the full height of its irregular and erratic power; while, for his mind, it was in a state of rapidly deepening discontent with and distrust of democratic tendencies, and of daily growing belief in the necessity of the Hero as Dictator. Him, or a

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shining example of him, Carlyle believed himself to have found in the person of his Excellency, Citizen Dr. José Gaspar Rodriguez Francia.

No doubt it was a selection which took some defending, and Carlyle is often as hard put to it to keep his idol on his pedestal as he was afterwards to maintain, in an erect position, that savage and half-insane old grenadier, the father of Frederick the Great. But the paradox of the eulogy and the perversity of the eulogist only lend additional piquancy to the performance. The whole story of the unscrupulous and victorious struggle of the Dictator with his rivals and his subjects, and of the twenty years of absolute and, in the main, beneficent rule which followed upon his triumph, is related with extraordinary spirit and vigour, and leaves behind it in the mind of the reader a vivid and enduring picture of the man. Moreover, the scenic surroundings not only of Francia's own life, but of the turbulent drama of South American politics during the decline and down to the fall of the Transatlantic Empire of Spain, had fired Carlyle's imagination; and there are certain pages descriptive of San Martin's march over the Andes into Chili which will bear comparison with the author's finest efforts in this particular style. The whole account of the expedition, brief as it is, is a masterpiece of the Carlylean picturesque. But in truth there is no great writer, not even Macaulay, whose studies of character and sketches of historic figures are more worthy to stand side by side with his larger canvases than are those of Carlyle. The temperament and even the genius of Voltaire were hopelessly antipathetic to him, and his essay on the great French *philosophe* suffers in consequence, exciting the reader's protest as, for opposite reasons, does the brilliant monograph on Mirabeau; but no one, however little disposed to accept his view of Voltaire as complete or satisfactory, can fail to appreciate the surpassing dexterity of the portrait. The 'Diderot,' though less striking, is still a vigorous piece of work; 'Cagliostro' and 'The Diamond Necklace,' are as good as the best

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episodical pieces in the *French Revolution*. The 'Burns' is famous, and the 'Boswell' the most complete reply to Macaulay's brilliant but shallow characterisation of Johnson's biographer. Failures, like the unfortunate essay on Sir Walter Scott, are so rare as to make that aberration virtually unique.

In this collection, however, containing as it does a good deal of Carlyle's best and maturest work, it has been thought well to include a certain number of those early writings of his which for various reasons have never yet been allowed to find a place in any previous edition, otherwise professedly complete. For this step no apology seems to me to be needed. This is no case of impiously dragging to light, regardless of the known or presumed wishes of their deceased author, works which he thought unworthy of him and would, if living, have desired to suppress. Even to our reprints from the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia* no such reproach as this would apply. True it is that they are only what Carlyle himself would have described as 'honest journeywork'; but that he was not ashamed of honest journeywork appears quite plainly in the passage quoted, in my Introduction to the volume of *German Romance*, from the author's preface to the earlier reprint. No doubt his contributions to the *Encyclopædia* were journeywork of a more commonplace and mechanical kind. They belong, indeed, distinctly to the 'hack' category; and are just such tasks as the needy scribes of the days of Johnson and Goldsmith had in mind when they talked about 'writing for the booksellers.' They were written, as most such articles were and still are, under the severest restrictions as to space; so that the writer's want of elbow-room inevitably reduces them to little more than a curt and bald catalogue of the material facts relating to his subject. If they possess the virtue of accuracy, it is all that is expected of them: indeed, it is the only expectation they could possibly satisfy. Still it would be too much to say even of these that they nowhere give promise, however faint and doubtful, of the future Carlyle. A sentence of unusual

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terseness and vigour, or a fresh and unexpected turn of phrase, might no doubt be detected here and there by a critical and attentive reader; but as a rule the 'pot-boilers' of the gods are not distinguishable from those of ordinary mortals, and there are no traces of divinity about Carlyle's. They might have been written in an equally meritorious manner by any industrious day-labourer in the British Museum Library; and, to me at least, they seem all the more interesting on that very account. There is even something pathetic in their mere alphabetical sequence; it is so touchingly eloquent of the fact that the immortal contributor's subjects were determined not by his own preferences but by the requirements of his editorial task-master. From Montaigne' to 'Montagu (Lady Mary Wortley)', and from Lady Mary back again to France in 'Montesquieu,' are quaint enough transitions, as also is that from 'The Netherlands' to 'Northamptonshire' and from 'Necker' to 'Nelson.' Their initial letter connects them by a tie even slighter than that which satisfied Captain Fluellen in the case of Alexander the Great and Prince Hal. Even absolute identity of name does not ensure any congruity between subjects; and the diligent-going journeyman has no sooner turned out one Moore than he is at work upon another. So much for the author of *Zeluco*, now for the hero of Coruña. It is not only Pegasus plodding along on the hoof instead of soaring on the wing; it is Pegasus actually in the carrier's cartshafts. And it is in no spirit of irreverence but with something almost like tenderness that one traces the course of the noble animal with the vehicle which he so honoured, and note how little 'say' he had in the selection of his route.

The last piece, however, which has been rescued from the limbo of 'back numbers' is of quite a different order. 'Cruthers and Jonson, or The Outskirts of Life,' contributed to *Fraser's Magazine* for January 1831—that is to say about the date of *Sartor Resartus*—is a piece of remarkable interest, as illustrative of Carlyle's strength and weakness alike. Considered as a story, it

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is 'stark naught.' It begins admirably, and prepares us to follow the fortunes of the two school-boy friends with the keenest sympathy and attention, as indeed we do up to the point at which Cruthers, now a yeoman farmer, visits and consoles his old class-mate Jonson, lying in Carlisle Castle under sentence of death for participation in the rebellion of the Forty-five. Later on the story slips limply out of the hand of its inventor and ends flatly enough. But the earlier part abounds in touches of the true Carlylean humour and pathos. The quarrel between the two boys, when Jonson, to avenge a drubbing at the hands of Cruthers, menaces his adversary with a large horse-pistol, to the dismay of Dominie Scroggs, is admirably related :

'The Dominie's jaw sank a considerable fraction of an ell ; his colour went and came ; he said, with a hollow tone, "The Lord be near us !" and sat down upon a stone by the wall-side, clasping his temples with both his hands, and then stooping till he grasped the whole firmly between his knees, to try if he could possibly determine what was to be done in this strange business. He spoke not for the space of three minutes and a half.'

One of the boys, he saw, must leave him ; the only question was, which. Cruthers' father was a staunch yeoman who ploughed his own land, but was well-to-do. Jonson's was a laird who disdained the plough, who loved to hunt and gamble, and whose 'annual consumpt of whisky was very great.' Mr. Scroggs was a gentleman that knew the world, and at length he made up his mind :—

"You Jonson," said he, rising gradually, "you have broken the peace of the school ; you have been a quarrelsome fellow, and when Cruthers got the better of you, in place of yielding or complaining to me, you have gone home privily and procured fire-arms with intent, as I conceive, to murder, or at least mortally affright, a fellow Christian, an honest man's child ; which, by the law of Moses, as you find in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, and also by various Acts of Parliament, is a very heinous crime. You likewise owe me two quarters of school wages, which I do not expect you will ever pay ; you cannot be here any longer. Go your ways, sirrah, and may all that's ill among us go with you."

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But a human instinct intervenes to save him :—

‘Apparently this most frank statement excited no very definite idea in Jonson’s mind ; at least he stood motionless on hearing it, his eyes fixed and tearless, his teeth clenched, his nostrils dilated, all his frame displaying symptoms of some inward agony by which his little mind was torn, but indicating no settled purpose of acting either this way or that. Most persons would have pitied him ; but Mr. Scroggs was free from that infirmity : he had felt no pity during many years for any but himself. Cruthers was younger and more generous : touched to the quick at his adversary’s forlorn situation, he stepped forward, and bravely signified that himself was equally to blame, promising, moreover, that if the past could be forgiven, he would so live with Jonson as to give no cause for censure in the future. “Let us both stay,” he said, “and we will never quarrel more.” Tears burst from Jonson’s eyes at this unexpected proposal. The Dominie himself, surprised and pleased, inquired if he was willing to stand by it ; for answer he stretched out his hand and grasped that of Cruthers in silence.’

The humorous, the pathetic, the dramatic touch of the future master—each surely is traceable here.

H. D. TRAILL.