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Thomas Carlyle

Moncure Daniel Conway (1832–1907), the son of a Virginian plantation-owner, became a Unitarian minister but his anti-slavery views made him controversial. He later became a freethinker, and following the outbreak of the Civil War, which deeply divided his own family, he left the United States for England in 1863. He gained a reputation as the ‘least orthodox preacher in London’, and was acquainted with many figures in the literary and scientific world, including Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin. This memoir of Thomas Carlyle, another friend, was published in 1881 soon after Carlyle’s death. Carlyle had not wanted to be the subject of a biography, and reluctantly authorised J. A. Froude to write one, but Conway rushed into print this somewhat hagiographical account because he was concerned, with reason, about the damage Froude’s frank biography (published in 1882–4 and also reissued in this series) might do to Carlyle’s reputation.

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Thomas Carlyle

MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY



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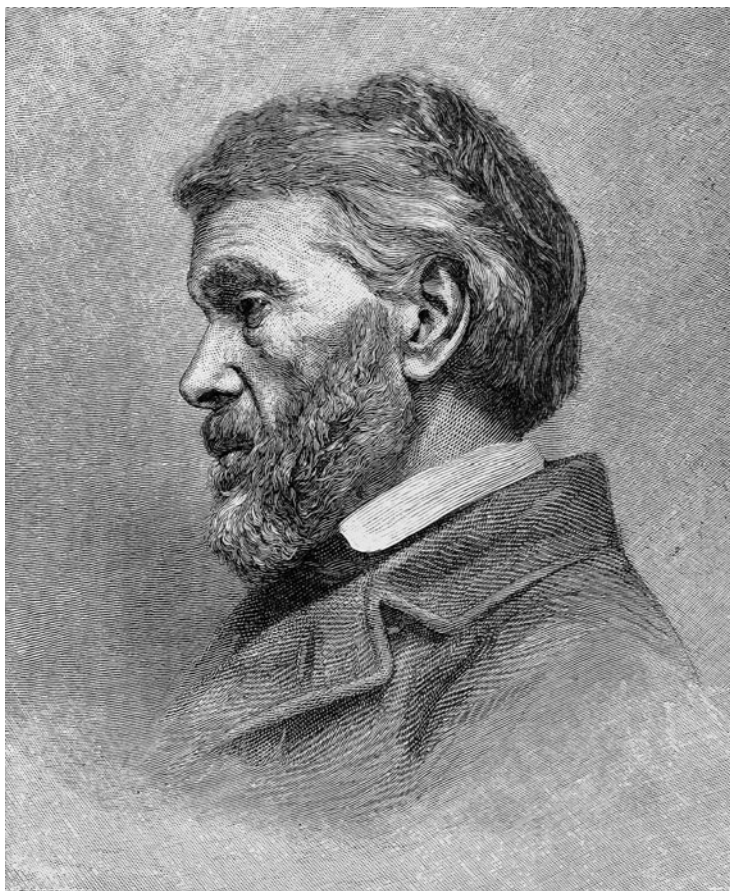
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THOMAS CARLYLE.

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THOMAS CARLYLE

BY
MONCURE D. CONWAY

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P R E F A C E.

EARLY in the year 1863, when I first visited England, Emerson gave me a letter of introduction to Thomas Carlyle, which at once secured for me a gracious reception and kindly entertainment from the author and his wife at Chelsea. It was their custom to receive their friends in the evening, and I was invited to join their circle as often as it might be convenient to me. As time went on, this evening circle at Carlyle's became smaller, and many a time I was the only guest present. I was also invited by Carlyle to share his walks, after he had given up the horseback exercise he used to take. These afternoon walks were long, generally through Kensington Gardens, Hyde Park, and even into Piccadilly. I was careful never to interrupt his hours of literary labor, and always to obey Mrs. Carlyle's kindly intimations as to his habits and exigencies. My relations with the memorable home at Chelsea were always, and to

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the last, very pleasant, never marred by any incident or word to be thought of now with regret.

This little book which I now send out to the world was veritably written by Carlyle himself. However inadequately transcribed and conveyed, these pages do faithfully follow impressions made by his own word and spirit upon my mind during an intercourse of many years. Nothing has been imported into them from other publications which have appeared since his death. The letters of Carlyle, and that charming one written by Emerson just after his first visit to him which is added to them, have been intrusted to me by my friend Alexander Ireland—author of an excellent bibliographical work on the writings of Hazlitt, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt—the valued friend of both Carlyle and Emerson. The suppressions indicated in those letters are of matters properly private—as, indeed, are various withheld notes of my own—and not things omitted with any theoretical purpose.

I have written out my notes and my memories with the man still vividly before me, and, as it were, still speaking; and, I must venture to add, it is a man I can by no means identify with any image that can be built up out of his “Reminiscences.” I do not wish to idealize Carlyle, but cannot admit

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that the outcries of a broken heart should be accepted as the man's true voice, or that measurements of men and memories as seen through burning tears should be recorded as characteristic of his heart or judgment. This sketch of mine is written and published in loyalty to the memory of those two at Chelsea whom, amid whatever differences of conviction, I honored and loved.

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