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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Dostoyevsky Smith Willis  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Henry Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Gogol Busch  
Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato Scott  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Plato Scott  
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# Past and Present

Thomas Carlyle

# Imprint

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THOMAS CARLYLE, born in 1795 at Ecclefechan, the son of a stonemason. Educated at Edinburgh University. Schoolmaster for a short time, but decided on a literary career, visiting Paris and London. Retired in 1828 to Dumfriesshire to write. In 1834 moved to Cheyne Row, Chelsea, and died there in 1881.



## INTRODUCTION

Being an appreciation from "The Dial" (July 1843)

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Here is Carlyle's new poem, his *Iliad* of English woes, to follow his poem on France, entitled the *History of the French Revolution*. In its first aspect it is a political tract, and since Burke, since Milton, we have had nothing to compare with it. It grapples honestly with the facts lying before all men, groups and disposes them with a master's mind, and, with a heart full of manly tenderness, offers his best counsel to his brothers. Obviously it is the book of a powerful and accomplished thinker, who has looked with naked eyes at the dreadful political signs in England for the last few years, has conversed much on these topics with such wisemen of all ranks and parties as are drawn to a scholar's house, until, such daily and nightly meditation has grown into a great connection, if not a system of thoughts; and the topic of English politics becomes the best vehicle for the expression of his recent thinking, recommended to him by the desire to give some timely counsels, and to strip the worst mischiefs of their plausibility. It is a brave and just book, and not a semblance. "No new truth," say the critics on all sides. Is it so? Truth is very old, but the merit of seers is not to invent but to dispose objects in their right places, and he is the commander who is always in the mount, whose eye not only sees details, but throws crowds of details into their right arrangement and a larger and juster totality than any other. The book makes great approaches to true contemporary history, a very rare success, and firmly holds up to daylight the absurdities still tolerated in the English and European system. It is such an appeal to the conscience and honour of England as cannot be forgotten, or be feigned to be forgotten. It has the merit which belongs to every honest book, that it was self-examining before it was eloquent, and so hits all other men, and, as

the country people say of good preaching, "comes bounce down into every pew." Every reader shall carry away something. The scholar shall read and write, the farmer and mechanic shall toil, with new resolution, nor forget the book when they resume their labour.

Though no theocrat, and more than most philosophers, a believer in political systems, Mr. Carlyle very fairly finds the calamity of the times, not in bad bills of Parliament, nor the remedy in good bills, but the vice in false and superficial aims of the people, and the remedy in honesty and insight. Like every work of genius, its great value is in telling such simple truths. As we recall the topics, we are struck with force given to the plain truths; the picture of the English nation all sitting enchanted, the poor, enchanted so that they cannot work, the rich, enchanted so that they cannot enjoy, and are rich in vain; the exposure of the progress of fraud into all arts and social activities; the proposition that the labourer must have a greater share in his earnings; that the principle of permanence shall be admitted into all contracts of mutual service; that the state shall provide at least schoolmaster's education for all the citizens; the exhortation to the workman that he shall respect the work and not the wages; to the scholar that he shall be there for light; to the idle, that no man shall sit idle; the picture of Abbot Samson, the true governor, who "is not there to expect reason and nobleness of others, he is there to give them of his own reason and nobleness;" the assumption throughout the book, that a new chivalry and nobility, namely the dynasty of labour, is replacing the old nobilities. These things strike us with a force which reminds us of the morals of the Oriental or early Greek masters, and of no modern book. Truly in these things is great reward. It is not by sitting so at a grand distance and calling the human race *larvae*, that men are to be helped, nor by helping the depraved after their own foolish fashion; but by doing unweariedly the particular work we were born to do. Let no man think himself absolved because he does a generous action and befriends the poor, but let him see whether he so holds his property that a benefit goes from it to all. A man's diet should be what is simplest and readiest to be had, because it is so private a good. His house should be better, because that is for the use of hundreds, perhaps of thousands, and is the property of the traveler. But his

speech is a perpetual and public instrument; let that always side with the race and yield neither a lie nor a sneer. His manners,—let them be hospitable and civilising, so that no Phidias or Raphael shall have taught anything better in canvas or stone; and his acts should be representative of the human race, as one who makes them rich in his having, and poor in his want.

It requires great courage in a man of letters to handle the contemporary practical questions; not because he then has all men for his rivals, but because of the infinite entanglements of the problem, and the waste of strength in gathering unripe fruits. The task is superhuman; and the poet knows well that a little time will do more than the most puissant genius. Time stills the loud noise of opinions, sinks the small, raises the great, so that the true emerges without effort and in perfect harmony to all eyes; but the truth of the present hour, except in particulars and single relations, is unattainable. Each man can very well know his own part of duty, if he will; but to bring out the truth for beauty, and as literature, surmounts the powers of art. The most elaborate history of today will have the oddest dislocated look in the next generation. The historian of today is yet three ages off. The poet cannot descend into the turbid present without injury to his rarest gifts. Hence that necessity of isolation which genius has always felt. He must stand on his glass tripod, if he would keep his electricity.

But when the political aspects are so calamitous that the sympathies of the man overpower the habits of the poet, a higher than Literary inspiration may succour him. It is a costly proof of character, that the most renowned scholar of England should take his reputation in his hand and should descend into the ring; and he has added to his love whatever honour his opinions may forfeit. To atone for this departure from the vows of the scholar and his eternal duties to this secular charity, we have at least this gain, that here is a message which those to whom it was addressed cannot choose but hear. Though they die, they must listen. It is plain that whether by hope or by fear, or were it only by delight in this panorama of brilliant images; all the great classes of English society must read, even those whose existence it proscribes. Poor Queen Victoria—poor Sir Robert Peel—poor Primate and Bishops—poor Dukes and Lords! There is no help in place or pride or in looking another way; a grain

of wit is more penetrating than the lightning of the night-storm, which no curtains or shutters will keep out. Here is a book which will be read, no thanks to anybody but itself. What pains, what hopes, what vows, shall come of the reading! Here is a book as full of treason as an egg is full of meat, and every lordship and worship and high form and ceremony of English conservatism tossed like a football into the air, and kept in the air, with merciless kicks and rebounds, and yet not a word is punishable by statute. The wit has eluded all official zeal; and yet these dire jokes, these cunning thrusts, this darning sword of Cherubim waved high in air, illuminates the whole horizon, and shows to the eyes of the universe every wound it inflicts. Worst of all for the party attacked, it bereaves them beforehand of all sympathy, by anticipating the plea of poetic and humane conservatism, and impressing the reader with the conviction that the satirist himself has the truest love for everything old and excellent in English land and institutions, and a genuine respect for the basis of truth in those whom he exposes.

We are at some loss how to state what strikes us as the fault of this remarkable book, for the variety and excellence of the talent displayed in it is pretty sure to leave all special criticism in the wrong. And we may easily fail in expressing the general objection which we feel. It appears to us as a certain disproportion in the picture, caused by the obtrusion of the whims of the painter. In this work, as in his former labours, Mr. Carlyle reminds us of a sick giant. His humours are expressed with so much force of constitution that his fancies are more attractive and more credible than the sanity of duller men. But the habitual exaggeration of the tone wears whilst it stimulates.

It is felt to be so much deduction from the universality of the picture. It is not serene sunshine, but everything is seen in lurid storm lights. Every object attitudinises, to the very mountains and stars almost, under the refraction of this wonderful humorist; and instead of the common earth and sky, we have a Martin's Creation or Judgment Day. A crisis has always arrived which requires a *deus ex machina*. One can hardly credit, whilst under the spell of this magician, that the world always had the same bankrupt look, to foregoing ages as to us—as of a failed world just re-collecting its old withered forces to begin again and try to do a little business. It was per-

haps inseparable from the attempt to write a book of wit and imagination on English politics, that a certain local emphasis and love of effect, such as is the vice of preaching, should appear, producing on the reader a feeling of forlornness by the excess of value attributed to circumstances. But the splendour of wit cannot out-dazzle the calm daylight, which always shows every individual man in balance with his age, and able to work out his own salvation from all the follies of that, and no such glaring contrasts or severalties in that or this. Each age has its own follies, as its majority is made up of foolish young people; its superstitions appear no superstitions to itself; and if you should ask the contemporary, he would tell you, with pride or with regret (according as he was practical or poetic), that he had none. But after a short time, down go its follies and weakness and the memory of them; its virtues alone remain, and its limitation assumes the poetic form of a beautiful superstition, as the dimness of our sight clothes the objects in the horizon with mist and colour. The revelation of Reason is this of the un-changeableness of the fate of humanity under all its subjective aspects; that to the cowering it always cowers, to the daring it opens great avenues. The ancients are only venerable to us because distance has destroyed what was trivial; as the sun and stars affect us only grandly, because we cannot reach to their smoke and surfaces and say, Is that all?

And yet the gravity of the times, the manifold and increasing dangers of the English State, may easily excuse some over-colouring of the picture; and we at this distance are not so far removed from any of the specific evils, and are deeply participant in too many, not to share the gloom and thank the love and the courage of the counselor. This book is full of humanity, and nothing is more excellent in this as in all Mr. Carlyle's works than the attitude of the writer. He has the dignity of a man of letters, who knows what belongs to him, and never deviates from his sphere; a continuer of the great line of scholars, and sustains their office in the highest credit and honour. If the good heaven have any good word to impart to this unworthy generation, here is one scribe qualified and clothed for its occasion. One excellence he has in an age of Mammon and of criticism, that he never suffers the eye of his wonder to close. Let who will be the dupe of trifles, he cannot keep his eye oft from that gracious Infinite which embosoms us.

As a literary artist he has great merits, beginning with the main one that he never wrote one dull line. How well-read, how adroit, what thousand arts in his one art of writing; with his expedient for expressing those unproven opinions which he entertains but will not endorse, by summoning one of his men of straw from the cell,—and the respectable Sauerteig, or Teufelsdröckh, or Dryasdust, or Picturesque Traveler, says what is put into his mouth, and disappears. That morbid temperament has given his rhetoric a somewhat bloated character; a luxury to many imaginative and learned persons, like a showery south-wind with its sunbursts and rapid chasing of lights and glooms over the landscape, and yet its offensiveness to multitudes of reluctant lovers makes us often wish some concession were possible on the part of the humorist. Yet it must not be forgotten that in all his fun of castanets, or playing of tunes with a whip-lash like some renowned charioteers,—in all this glad and needful venting of his redundant spirits, he does yet ever and anon, as if catching the glance of one wise man in the crowd, quit his tempestuous key, and lance at him in clear level tone the very word, and then with new glee return to his game. He is like a lover or an outlaw who wraps up his message in a serenade, which is nonsense to the sentinel, but salvation to the ear for which it is meant. He does not dodge the question, but gives sincerity where it is due.

One word more respecting this remarkable style. We have in literature few specimens of magnificence. Plato is the purple ancient, and Bacon and Milton the moderns of the richest strains. Burke sometimes reaches to that exuberant fullness, though deficient in depth. Carlyle in his strange, half mad way, has entered the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and shown a vigour and wealth of resource which has no rival in the tourney play of these times—the indubitable champion of England. Carlyle is the first domestication of the modern system, with its infinity of details, into style. We have been civilising very fast, building London and Paris, and now planting New England and India, New Holland and Oregon—and it has not appeared in literature; there has been no analogous expansion and recomposition in books. Carlyle's style is the first emergence of all this wealth and labour with which the world has gone with child so long. London and Europe, tunneled, graded, corn-lawed, with trade-nobility, and East and West Indies for dependencies, and America,

with the Rocky Hills in the horizon, have never before been conquered in literature. This is the first invasion and conquest. How like an air-balloon or bird of Jove does he seem to float over the continent, and stooping here and there pounce on a fact as a symbol which was never a symbol before. This is the first experiment, and something of rudeness and haste must be pardoned to so great an achievement. It will be done again and again, sharper, simpler; but fortunate is he who did it first, though never so giant-like and fabulous. This grandiose character pervades his wit and his imagination. We have never had anything in literature so like earthquakes as the laughter of Carlyle. He "shakes with his mountain mirth." It is like the laughter of the Genii in the horizon. These jokes shake down Parliament-house and Windsor Castle, Temple and Tower, and the future shall echo the dangerous peals. The other particular of magnificence is in his rhymes. Carlyle is a poet who is altogether too burly in his frame and habit to submit to the limits of metre. Yet he is full of rhythm, not only in the perpetual melody of his periods, but in the burdens, refrains, and returns of his sense and music. Whatever thought or motto has once appeared to him fraught with meaning, becomes an omen to him henceforward, and is sure to return with deeper tones and weightier import, now as threat, now as confirmation, in gigantic reverberation, as if the hills, the horizon, and the next ages returned the sound.

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Summary



## Book I—Proem

### Chapter I

#### Midas

The condition of England, on which many pamphlets are now in the course of publication, and many thoughts unpublished are going on in every reflective head, is justly regarded as one of the most ominous, and withal one of the strangest, ever seen in this world. England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition. With unabated bounty the land of England blooms and grows; waving with yellow harvests; thick-studded with workshops, industrial implements, with fifteen millions of workers, understood to be the strongest, the cunningest and the willingest our Earth ever had; these men are here; the work they have done, the fruit they have realised is here, abundant, exuberant on every hand of us: and behold, some baleful fiat as of Enchantment has gone forth, saying, "Touch it not, ye workers, ye master-workers, ye master-idlers; none of you can touch it, no man of you shall be the better for it; this is enchanted fruit!" On the poor workers such fiat falls first, in its rudest shape; but on the rich masterworkers too it falls; neither can the rich master-idlers, nor any richest or highest man escape, but all are like to be brought low with it, and made 'poor' enough, in the money-sense or a far faller one.

Of these successful skillful workers some two millions, it is now counted, sit in Workhouses, Poor-law Prisons; or have 'out-door relief' flung over the wall to them,—the workhouse Bastille being filled to bursting, and the strong Poor-law broken asunder by a stronger.\* They sit there, these many months now; their hope of deliverance as yet small. In workhouses, pleasantly so named, because work cannot be done in them. Twelve hundred thousand workers in England alone; their cunning right-hand lamed, lying

idle in their sorrowful bosom; their hopes, outlooks, share of this fair world, shut in by narrow walls. They sit there, pent up, as in a kind of horrid enchantment; glad to be imprisoned and enchanted, that they may not perish starved. The picturesque Tourist, in a sunny autumn day, through this bounteous realm of England, describes the Union Workhouse on his path. 'Passing by the Workhouse of St. Ives in Huntingdonshire, on a bright day last autumn,' says the picturesque Tourist, 'I saw sitting on wooden benches, in front of their Bastille and within their ringwall and its railings, some half-hundred or more of these men. Tall robust figures, young mostly or of middle age; of honest countenance, many of them thoughtful and even intelligent-looking men. They sat there, near by one another; but in a kind of torpor, especially in a silence, which was very striking. In silence: for, alas, what word was to be said? An Earth all lying round, crying, Come and till me, come and reap me;—yet we here sit enchanted! In the eyes and brows of these men hung the gloomiest expression, not of anger, but of grief and shame and manifold inarticulate distress and weariness; they returned my glance with a glance that seemed to say, "Do not look at us. We sit enchanted here, we know not why. The Sun shines and the Earth calls; and, by the governing Powers and Impotences of this England, we are forbidden to obey. It is impossible, they tell us!" There was something that reminded me of Dante's Hell in the look of all this; and I rode swiftly away.

— — — — \* The Return of Paupers for England and Wales, at Laidyday, 1842, is, "In-door 221,687, Out-door 1,207,402, Total 1,429,089." — (Official Report) — — — —

So many hundred thousands sit in workhouses: and other hundred thousands have not yet got even workhouses; and in thrifty Scotland itself, in Glasgow or Edinburgh City, in their dark lanes, hidden from all but the eye of God, and of rare Benevolence the minister of God, there are scenes of woe and destitution and desolation, such as, one may hope, the Sun never saw before in the most barbarous regions where men dwelt. Competent witnesses, the brave and humane Dr. Alison, who speaks what he knows, whose noble Healing Art in his charitable hands becomes once more a truly sacred one, report these things for us: these things are not of this year, or of last year, have no reference to our present state of