

## THOMAS CARLYLE

**T**HOMAS CARLYLE, eminent British historian and essayist, and one of the greatest forces in English literature, was born in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, Dec. 4, 1795, and died at Chelsea, London, Feb. 4, 1881. He received his education first at the Parish School at Annan, and afterward at the University of Edinburgh. Meanwhile, he read voraciously and widely, wrote for Brewster's "Edinburgh Encyclopædia," and published in a London magazine his "Life of Schiller." He also at this time issued his translations of Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister" and Legendre's "Geometry." In 1826, he married, and retired to a property possessed by his wife at Craigenputtoch, in Dumfriesshire. Here he worked assiduously on the essays on French and German authors, afterward published in his "Miscellanies," and on his first great and original work, "Sartor Resartus," issued in 1833-34 in "Fraser's Magazine." His reputation as a thinker and forcible writer having been established, he removed to Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, which thereafter became his home. Here he began the serious work of his life—the production of "The French Revolution," "Cromwell's Letters and Speeches," "Life of John Sterling," "Past and Present," "History of Frederick the Great," "Early Kings of Norway," "Chartism," and "Latter-Day Pamphlets," besides lecturing on German literature, and on those types of grand men among the world's prophets and rulers which were subsequently issued under the title of "Heroes and Hero-Worship." To these works he added, in separate form, his installation address delivered as Lord Rector of Edinburgh University, "On the Choice of Books"—a most instructive and thought-stimulating essay. In this great body of literature he has left behind him much of enduring value, in spite of his censoriousness, and his cynical and peevish moods, and of his rough and jerky literary style—yet a style that seems to fit the censor and moralist better and more effectively than would one of more smoothness and polish. In his day, he was the most suggestive of writers and the grimmest and most impressive of historical painters.

### INAUGURAL ADDRESS AT EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY

DELIVERED APRIL 2, 1866, ON HIS INSTALLATION AS LORD RECTOR

**G**ENTLEMEN,—I have accepted the office you have elected me to, and it is now my duty to return thanks for the great honor done me. Your enthusiasm toward me, I must admit, is in itself very beautiful, however undeserved it may be in regard to the object of it. It is a feeling honorable to all men, and one well known to myself when I was of an age like yours, nor is it yet quite gone. I can only hope that with you too it may endure to the end,—

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this noble desire to honor those whom you think worthy of honor; and that you will come to be more and more select and discriminate in the choice of the object of it—for I can well understand that you will modify your opinions of me and of many things else, as you go on. It is now fifty-six years, gone last November, since I first entered your city, a boy of not quite fourteen; to attend the classes here, and gain knowledge of all kinds, I could little guess what, my poor mind full of wonder and awe-struck expectation; and now, after a long course, this is what we have come to. There is something touching and tragic, and yet at the same time beautiful, to see, as it were, the third generation of my dear old native land rising up and saying, "Well, you are not altogether an unworthy laborer in the vineyard; you have toiled through a great variety of fortunes, and have had many judges: this is our judgment of you!" As the old proverb says, "He that builds by the wayside has many masters." We must expect a variety of judges; but the voice of young Scotland, through you, is really of some value to me; and I return you many thanks for it,—though I cannot go into describing my emotions to you, and perhaps they will be much more perfectly conceivable if expressed in silence.

When this office was first proposed to me, some of you know I was not very ambitious to accept it, but had my doubts rather. I was taught to believe that there were certain more or less important duties which would lie in my power. This, I confess, was my chief motive in going into it and overcoming the objections I felt to such things: if I could do anything to serve my dear old Alma Mater and you, why should not I? Well, but on practically looking into the matter when the office actually came into my hands, I find it grows more and

more uncertain and abstruse to me whether there is much real duty that I can do at all. I live four hundred miles away from you, in an entirely different scene of things; and my weak health, with the burden of the many years now accumulating on me, and my total unacquaintance with such subjects as concern your affairs here,—all this fills me with apprehension that there is really nothing worth the least consideration that I can do on that score. You may depend on it, however, that if any such duty does arise in any form, I will use my most faithful endeavor to do in it whatever is right and proper, according to the best of my judgment.

Meanwhile, the duty I at present have,—which might be very pleasant, but which is not quite so, for reasons you may fancy,—is to address some words to you, if possible not quite useless, nor incongruous to the occasion, and on subjects more or less cognate to the pursuits you are engaged in. Accordingly, I mean to offer you some loose observations, loose in point of order, but the truest I have, in such form as they may present themselves; certain of the thoughts that are in me about the business you are here engaged in, what kind of race it is that you young gentlemen have started on, and what sort of arena you are likely to find in this world. I ought, I believe, according to custom, to have written all that down on paper, and had it read out. That would have been much handier for me at the present moment; but on attempting the thing, I found I was not used to write speeches, and that I didn't get on very well. So I flung that aside, and could only resolve to trust, in all superficial respects, to the suggestion of the moment, as you now see. You will therefore have to accept what is readiest; what comes direct from the heart; and you must just take that in compensation for any good order or arrangement there might have been in it. I

will endeavor to say nothing that is not true, so far as I can manage; and that is pretty much all I can engage for.

Advices, I believe, to young men, as to all men, are very seldom much valued. There is a great deal of advising, and very little faithful performing; and talk that does not end in any kind of action is better suppressed altogether. I would not, therefore, go much into advising; but there is one advice I must give you. In fact, it is the summary of all advices, and doubtless you have heard it a thousand times; but I must nevertheless let you hear it the thousand-and-first time, for it is most intensely true, whether you will believe it at present or not: namely, That above all things the interest of your whole life depends on your being diligent, now while it is called to-day, in this place where you have come to get education! Diligent: that includes in it all virtues that a student can have; I mean it to include all those qualities of conduct that lead on to the acquirement of real instruction and improvement in such a place. If you will believe me, you who are young, yours is the golden season of life. As you have heard it called, so it verily is, the seedtime of life; in which, if you do not sow, or if you do sow tares instead of wheat, you cannot expect to reap well afterward, and you will arrive at little. And in the course of years, when you come to look back, if you have not done what you have heard from your advisers,—and among many counsellors there is wisdom,—you will bitterly repent when it is too late. The habits of study acquired at universities are of the highest importance in after-life. At the season when you are young in years, the whole mind is, as it were, fluid, and is capable of forming itself into any shape that the owner of the mind pleases to allow it, or constrain it, to form itself into. The mind is then in a plastic or fluid state; but it hardens gradually, to the

consistency of rock or of iron, and you cannot alter the habits of an old man: he, as he has begun, so he will proceed and go on to the last.

By diligence I mean, among other things, and very chiefly too,—honesty, in all your inquiries, and in all you are about. Pursue your studies in the way your conscience can name honest. More and more endeavor to do that. Keep, I should say for one thing, an accurate separation between what you have really come to know in your minds and what is still unknown. Leave all that latter on the hypothetical side of the barrier, as things afterwards to be acquired, if acquired at all; and be careful not to admit a thing as known when you do not yet know it. Count a thing known only when it is imprinted clearly on your mind, and has become transparent to you, so that you may survey it on all sides with intelligence. There is such a thing as a man endeavoring to persuade himself, and endeavoring to persuade others, that he knows things, when he does not know more than the outside skin of them; and yet he goes flourishing about with them. There is also a process called cramming, in some universities, that is, getting up such points of things as the examiner is likely to put questions about. Avoid all that, as entirely unworthy of an honorable mind. Be modest, and humble, and assiduous in your attention to what your teachers tell you, who are profoundly interested in trying to bring you forward in the right way, so far as they have been able to understand it. Try all things they set before you, in order, if possible, to understand them, and to follow and adopt them in proportion to their fitness for you. Gradually see what kind of work you individually can do; it is the first of all problems for a man to find out what kind of work he is to do in this universe. In short, morality as regards study is, as in all other things, the

primary consideration, and overrules all others. A dishonest man cannot do anything real; he never will study with real fruit; and perhaps it would be greatly better if he were tied up from trying it. He does nothing but darken counsel by the words he utters. That is a very old doctrine, but a very true one; and you will find it confirmed by all the thinking men that have ever lived in this long series of generations of which we are the latest.

I daresay you know, very many of you, that it is now some seven hundred years since universities were first set up in this world of ours. Abelard and other thinkers had arisen with doctrines in them which people wished to hear of, and students flocked toward them from all parts of the world. There was no getting the thing recorded in books as you now may. You had to hear the man speaking to you vocally, or else you could not learn at all what it was that he wanted to say. And so they gathered together, these speaking ones,—the various people who had anything to teach,—and formed themselves gradually, under the patronage of kings and other potentates who were anxious about the culture of their populations, and nobly studious of their best benefit; and became a body corporate, with high privileges, high dignities, and really high aims, under the title of a university.

Possibly too you may have heard it said that the course of centuries has changed all this; and that “the true university of our days is a collection of books.” And beyond doubt, all this is greatly altered by the invention of printing, which took place about midway between us and the origin of universities. Men have not now to go in person to where a professor is actually speaking; because in most cases you can get his doctrine out of him through a book; and can then read it, and read it again and again, and study it. That is an immense

change, that one fact of printed books. And I am not sure that I know of any university in which the whole of that fact has yet been completely taken in, and the studies molded in complete conformity with it. Nevertheless, universities have, and will continue to have, an indispensable value in society,—I think, a very high, and it might be almost the highest value. They began, as is well known, with their grand aim directed on theology,—their eye turned earnestly on heaven. And perhaps, in a sense, it may be still said, the very highest interests of man are virtually intrusted to them. In regard to theology, as you are aware, it has been, and especially was then, the study of the deepest heads that have come into the world,—what is the nature of this stupendous universe, and what are our relations to it, and to all things knowable by man, or known only to the great author of man and it. Theology was once the name for all this; all this is still alive for man, however dead the name may grow. In fact, the members of the Church keeping theology in a lively condition for the benefit of the whole population, theology was the great object of the universities. I consider it is the same intrinsically now, though very much forgotten, from many causes, and not so successful as might be wished, by any manner of means.

It remains, however, practically a most important truth, what I alluded to above, that the main use of universities in the present age is that, after you have done with all your classes, the next thing is a collection of books, a great library of good books, which you proceed to study and to read. What the universities can mainly do for you,—what I have found the university did for me, is, that it taught me to read, in various languages, in various sciences; so that I could go into the books which treated of these things, and gradually

penetrate into any department I wanted to make myself master of, as I found it suit me.

Well, gentlemen, whatever you may think of these historical points, the clearest and most imperative duty lies on every one of you to be assiduous in your reading. Learn to be good readers,—which is perhaps a more difficult thing than you imagine. Learn to be discriminative in your reading; to read faithfully, and with your best attention, all kinds of things which you have a real interest in, a real not an imaginary, and which you find to be really fit for what you are engaged in. Of course, at the present time, in a great deal of the reading incumbent on you, you must be guided by the books recommended by your professors for assistance towards the effect of their prelections. And then, when you leave the university, and go into studies of your own, you will find it very important that you have chosen a field, some province specially suited to you, in which you can study and work. The most unhappy of all men is the man who cannot tell what he is going to do, who has got no work cut out for him in the world, and does not go into it. For work is the grand cure of all the maladies and miseries that ever beset mankind,—honest work, which you intend getting done.

If, in any vacant vague time, you are in a strait as to choice of reading,—a very good indication for you, perhaps the best you could get, is toward some book you have a great curiosity about. You are then in the readiest and best of all possible conditions to improve by that book. It is analogous to what doctors tell us about the physical health and appetites of the patient. You must learn, however, to distinguish between false appetite and true. There is such a thing as a false appetite, which will lead a man into vagaries with regard to diet; will tempt him to eat spicy things, which he should not

eat at all, nor would, but that the things are toothsome, and that he is under a momentary baseness of mind. A man ought to examine and find out what he really and truly has an appetite for, what suits his constitution and condition; and that, doctors tell him, is in general the very thing he ought to have. And so with books.

As applicable to all of you, I will say that it is highly expedient to go into history; to inquire into what has passed before you on this earth, and in the family of man.

The history of the Romans and Greeks will first of all concern you; and you will find that the classical knowledge you have got will be extremely applicable to elucidate that. There you have two of the most remarkable races of men in the world set before you, calculated to open innumerable reflections and considerations; a mighty advantage, if you can achieve it,—to say nothing of what their two languages will yield you, which your professors can better explain; model languages, which are universally admitted to be the most perfect forms of speech we have yet found to exist among men. And you will find, if you read well, a pair of extremely remarkable nations, shining in the records left by themselves, as a kind of beacon, or solitary mass of illumination, to light up some noble forms of human life for us, in the otherwise utter darkness of the past ages; and it will be well worth your while if you can get into the understanding of what these people were, and what they did. You will find a great deal of hearsay, of empty rumor and tradition, which does not touch on the matter; but perhaps some of you will get to see the old Roman and the old Greek face to face; you will know in some measure how they contrived to exist, and to perform their feats in the world.

I believe, also, you will find one important thing not much

noted, That there was a very great deal of deep religion in both nations. This is pointed out by the wiser kind of historians, and particularly by Ferguson, who is very well worth reading on Roman history,—and who, I believe, was an alumnus of our own university. His book is a very creditable work. He points out the profoundly religious nature of the Roman people, notwithstanding their ruggedly positive, defiant, and fierce ways. They believed that Jupiter Optimus Maximus was lord of the universe, and that he had appointed the Romans to become the chief of nations, provided they followed his commands,—to brave all danger, all difficulty, and stand up with an invincible front, and be ready to do and die; and also to have the same sacred regard to truth of promise, to thorough veracity, thorough integrity, and all the virtues that accompany that noblest quality of man, valor,—to which latter the Romans gave the name of “virtue” proper (*virtus*, manhood), as the crown and summary of all that is ennobling for a man. In the literary ages of Rome this religious feeling had very much decayed away; but it still retained its place among the lower classes of the Roman people. Of the deeply religious nature of the Greeks, along with their beautiful and sunny effulgences of art, you have striking proof, if you look for it. In the tragedies of Sophocles there is a most deep-toned recognition of the eternal justice of Heaven, and the unfailing punishment of crime against the laws of God. I believe you will find in all histories of nations, that this has been at the origin and foundation of them all; and that no nation which did not contemplate this wonderful universe with an awestricken and reverential belief that there was a great unknown, omnipotent, and all-wise and all-just Being, superintending all men in it, and all interests

in it,—no nation ever came to very much, nor did any man either, who forgot that. If a man did forget that, he forgot the most important part of his mission in this world.

Our own history of England, which you will naturally take a great deal of pains to make yourselves acquainted with, you will find beyond all others worthy of your study. For indeed I believe that the British nation,—including in that the Scottish nation,—produced a finer set of men than any you will find it possible to get anywhere else in the world. I don't know, in any history of Greece or Rome, where you will get so fine a man as Oliver Cromwell, for example. And we too have had men worthy of memory, in our little corner of the island here, as well as others; and our history has had its heroic features all along; and did become great at last in being connected with world-history:—for if you examine well, you will find that John Knox was the author, as it were, of Oliver Cromwell; that the Puritan revolution never would have taken place in England at all, had it not been for that Scotchman. That is an authentic fact, and is not prompted by national vanity on my part, but will stand examining.

In fact, if you look at the struggle that was then going on in England, as I have had to do in my time, you will see that people were overawed by the immense impediments lying in the way. A small minority of God-fearing men in that country were flying away, with any ship they could get, to New England, rather than take the lion by the beard. They durst not confront the powers with their most just complaints, and demands to be delivered from idolatry. They wanted to make the nation altogether conformable to the Hebrew Bible, which they, and all men, understood to be the exact transcript of the will of God; and could there be, for man, a more legitimate aim? Nevertheless, it would have been impossible in

their circumstances, and not to be attempted at all, had not Knox succeeded in it here, some fifty years before, by the firmness and nobleness of his mind. For he also is of the select of the earth to me,—John Knox. What he has suffered from the ungrateful generations that have followed him should really make us humble ourselves to the dust, to think that the most excellent man our country has produced, to whom we owe everything that distinguishes us among the nations, should have been so sneered at, misknown, and abused. Knox was heard by Scotland; the people heard him, believed him to the marrow of their bones; they took up his doctrine, and they defied principalities and powers to move them from it. “We must have it,” they said; “we will and must!” It was in this state of things that the Puritan struggle arose in England; and you know well how the Scottish earls and nobility, with their tenantry, marched away to Dunse Hill in 1639, and sat down there: just at the crisis of that struggle, when it was either to be suppressed or brought into greater vitality, they encamped on Dunse Hill,—thirty thousand armed men, drawn out for that occasion, each regiment round its landlord, its earl, or whatever he might be called, and zealous all of them “For Christ's Crown and Covenant.” That was the signal for all England's rising up into unappeasable determination to have the Gospel there also; and you know it went on, and came to be a contest whether the Parliament or the king should rule; whether it should be old formalities and use-and-wont, or something that had been of new conceived in the souls of men, namely, a divine determination to walk according to the laws of God here, as the sum of all prosperity; which of these should have the mastery: and after a long, long agony of struggle, it was decided—the way we know.