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EUROPEAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Carlyle's Unpublished Lectures.

LECTURES
ON THE
HISTORY OF LITERATURE
OR THE SUCCESSIVE PERIODS OF
EUROPEAN CULTURE
DELIVERED IN 1838

BY
THOMAS CARLYLE

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED

FROM THE ANSTEY MS. IN THE LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH
ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

EDITED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY
R. P. KARKARIA

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CONTENTS.

PERIOD I.

LECTURE I.

	PAGE.
Of Literature in general—Language—Tradition—Religions—Races—The Greeks : their Character in History ; their Fortune, Performance—Mythologies ; Origin of Gods	1

LECTURE II.

Homer—The Heroic Ages—from Æschylus to Socrates—Decline of the Greeks	15
--	----

LECTURE III.

The Romans, their Character, their Fortune ; what they did—from Virgil to Tacitus—End of Paganism ...	33
---	----

PERIOD II.

LECTURE IV.

Middle Ages—Christianity—Faith—Inventions—Pious Foundations—Pope Hildebrand—Crusades—The Troubadours—The Nibelungen Lied	53
---	----

LECTURE V.

The Italians — Dante —Catholicism—Hell—Purgatory—Heaven	73
--	----

LECTURE VI.

On Spaniards—Chivalry—Greatness of the Spanish Nation—Cervantes, his Life, his Book—Lope—Calderon—Protestantism and the Dutch War	91
--	----

LECTURE VII.

	PAGE.
The Germans ; what they have done—Reformation—Luther—Ulrich Hutten—Erasmus	111

LECTURE VIII.

The English ; their Origin, their Work and Destiny—Elizabethan Era—Shakspeare—John Knox—Milton—Beginning of Scepticism	131
---	-----

LECTURE IX.

French Scepticism—Voltaire—from Rabelais to Rousseau —	—
--	---

PERIOD III.

LECTURE X.

The Eighteenth Century in England. Johnson—David Hume	149
--	-----

LECTURE XI.

Consummation of Scepticism—Werterism—The French Revolution	165
---	-----

PERIOD IV.

LECTURE XII.

Of Modern German Literature—Goethe and his Works—Schiller—Jean Paul Richter	183
--	-----

INTRODUCTION

THE work of Carlyle, which is now published for the first time in the present volume, has lain for more than half a century in manuscript, during which it has been given up as irretrievably lost by all admirers of the great writer's works. "It must ever be a source of regret" says Mr. Wylie in his *Life of Carlyle*, "to the students of Carlyle's writings that while the reporters of the London Press were, in that summer of 1838, busy preserving every word of the orations of men who are already forgotten, a poor fragment is all that has come down to us of a series of lectures which would have thrown so much light on the story of Carlyle's spiritual life" (p. 169). And Mr. J. A. Froude, his literary executor and biographer, refers the curious to the meagre reports in the *Examiner* and other papers of the time (*Life in London*, vol. I, p. 126). One reason why no manuscript of Carlyle exists is that these lectures were not written out, but strictly spoken. He prepared himself carefully for each lecture, but did not *read* to his audience. "He had undertaken to *speak*, and speak he would, or else fail altogether." He usually brought some notes with him to the lecture-room, but never used them. Miss Kate Perry, writing

* In this Introduction I resume some passages which formed part of a paper read by me before the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society on 31st August 1891.

to Sir Henry Taylor in 1882 about her reminiscences of Carlyle's Lectures of 1840, says: "I remember Jenny imitating him very funnily when looking at his notes. After his hour was over, he said: 'I find I have been talking to you all for one hour and twenty minutes, and not said *one word* of what is down on this sheet of paper—the subject-matter of our lecture to-day. I ask you your indulgence, though you have a good right not to give it to me; so good morning.' I daresay you were present also at that lecture, and remember the amusement it caused" (Correspondence of Sir H. Taylor, ed. Dr. Dowden, p. 400). Later, when he published his course on Heroes, he wrote out the whole for the press after the delivery of the lectures.

But amongst his audience Carlyle had at least one young man who, discerning the great value of what he was hearing, took pains to have full notes of these lectures. About his audience, Carlyle himself, writing to his mother, says: "My audience was supposed to be the best, for rank, beauty, and intelligence, ever collected in London. I had bonnie, braw dames, ladies this, ladies that, though I dared not look at them, for fear they should put me out. I had old men of four-score; men middle-aged, with fine steel-grey beards; young men of the universities, of the law profession, all sitting quite mum there, and the Annandale voice gollying at them" (Froude, *Life in London*, vol. I, p. 140). Among these last was Mr. Thomas Chisholm Anstey,* who

* Thomas Chisholm Anstey, lawyer and politician, was, says Mr. Skiney Lee in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the son of one of the earliest settlers in Tasmania, and was born in London in 1816. He was educated at Wellington College and at University College, London, and in Hilary term, 1839, was called to the bar at the Middle Temple. He was greatly affected by the Oxford movement, and was one of the earliest converts to Roman Catholicism that it produced. He was for a short time Professor of law and jurisprudence at the Roman Catholic College of Prior Park, near Bath. Resigning his professorship, he took to politics and became a violent supporter of the extreme section of O'Connell's followers. He was Member of Parliament for Youghal from 1847—52, and distinguished himself by his intemperate attacks on Palmerston's foreign policy. Retiring from politics, in 1854 he was nominated Attorney-General for Hongkong; but on account of his

was then studying law in London and was a little later called to the bar. Anstey was present at all the lectures except the ninth, having been unable to attend on the day on which it was delivered,—“ being confined to my bed with a new access of the malaria I brought from Rome,” as he carefully notes in the MS. This lecture, which was on “ French Scepticism, and Voltaire and Rousseau,” was therefore not reported by Anstey and consequently does not appear in the present volume ; and there is reason to believe that it is now irretrievably lost. But the loss seems to be not very serious, as this missing lecture was, in Carlyle’s own opinion, the weakest of the series. He notes in his Journal : “ On Voltaire and French Scepticism is the worst, as I compute, of all. On the day I was stupid and sick beyond expression ; also I did not *like* the man, a fatal circumstance of itself. I had to hover vague on the surface. The people seemed content enough. I myself felt sincerely disgusted. That is the word ” (Froude I., 137). Moreover, there is an excellent summary of this lecture at the beginning of the tenth, and the subject is one which Carlyle has treated at great length in his published works, in his essays on Voltaire and Diderot, and elsewhere.

The full report that Anstey took of Carlyle’s lectures he had carefully preserved in a small quarto note-book of 214 leaves in his own extensive library ; and when this was dispersed at the time of his death in Bombay, it came into the possession

too zealous desire to root out the abuses he found in the government of the Colony, he came into frequent collision with Sir John Bowring, the Governor, and in 1859 had to retire from his post. After some time spent in England, he came to India to practise at the Bombay bar, where he rapidly achieved a great success, and was in 1865 appointed to fill a temporary vacancy on the bench, from which however he had to withdraw owing to controversies with his superiors. In 1866 he returned to England and threw himself into the agitation for Parliamentary reform then going on. In 1868 he returned to Bombay to resume his practice and became very popular with the natives, especially Parsis, whom he defended very ably in what was known as the Tower of Silence case, and amongst whom his name is to this day a household word. He died in Bombay on 12th August 1873. Anstey was the author of several pamphlets on constitutional, legal and political subjects.

of the Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society, in whose library it has been lying for the last eighteen years. From this manuscript note-book of Anstey, which appears to be the only* full report of these lectures in existence, this edition has been prepared, and I thank the Society for the permission of using it for this edition accorded to me, through its learned President, the Honourable Sir Raymond West, and its zealous honorary secretary, the Honourable Mr. Javerilal Umiashanker Yajnik. I have altered here and there the punctuation, and throughout the spelling, which is very careless in the manuscript. Carlyle's own way of spelling proper names as found in his other works has been adopted.

The immediate occasion of Carlyle mounting the platform and giving lectures to a 'dandiacal' audience, against whom he had inveighed in *Sartor*, was his straitened pecuniary circumstances. His object was, as he himself says in these lectures of Shakspeare, "to gather a little money, for he was very necessitous" (*infra*, p. 45). Thus it was his poverty consented, not his will. Though by the year 1838 he had done some of his best work, written *Sartor*, which is now the most widely read of his works (Dr. Smiles, *Memoir of Murray*, vol. II, p. 356), and just finished his grand epic of the French Revolution, besides having written some of his best shorter essays, Carlyle had not yet emerged into fame;† the vast public which later on learnt to admire his writings, in spite of their superficial uncouthness and repulsiveness, had not yet arisen. He had yet to educate and almost to create the public taste to appreciate his works. His books, therefore, could either find

* Dr. Dowden published in an article, in the *Nineteenth Century* for May 1881, some extracts from a report of these Lectures in his possession; and this article has been reprinted in his *Transcripts and Studies*, 1887. Dr. Dowden's report is a blundering one, omitting some words which are to be found in the Anstey MS., and its readings, as I have shown elsewhere, are distinctly inferior to the latter. From some of its mistakes, as well as the fact that it also wants the ninth lecture, it would seem that Dr. Dowden's is a careless copy of the Anstey MS.

† Since writing this I find that Mr. Lecky tries to account for this early neglect of Carlyle, in the *Contemporary Review* for September 1891.

no publisher at all, or, if published, bring him no profit whatever. He was, as a consequence, in constant dread of misery and ruin. But amidst this gloom of darkness there was one ray of hope. A prophet has proverbially no honour in his own country. But beyond the Atlantic, in the new home which his countrymen had found for their shattered liberties, they showed greater discernment. Carlyle was honoured there as a rising great teacher. The Americans could appreciate the philosophy of Herr Teufelsdröch, and, what was of more vital importance, could pay in hard dollars for it, much earlier than the British Philistine. Moreover, he had kind friends there, especially the Emersons, who would willingly do everything for him. So Carlyle almost resolved to have nothing more to do with the Old England that had treated him so harshly, and to start for New and kinder England,—“to buy a rifle and spade, and withdraw to the Transatlantic Wilderness, far from human beggaries and basenesses !” as he himself put it vigorously (*Reminiscences*, ed. Froude, vol. II, p. 180). Thus his country was about to lose him just at the time when he had reached the maturity of his powers. Some keen-sighted friends, who knew what a loss and a shame it would be to let such a man go, resolved to keep him back still. It was known that he was going to America in response to an invitation to lecture there. So these friends, chief among whom were Harriet Martineau and the Wilsons, prevailed upon him to remain and lecture at home.

Carlyle had a great horror of mounting the platform, and hated this kind of work. “The excitement of lecturing,” says Mr. Froude, whose *Life* of his great master is worthy to rank by the side of Boswell and Lockhart, Carlyle’s own *Sterling* and Sir George Trevelyan’s *Macaulay*, as one of the very best biographies in any literature, “so elevating and agreeable to most men, seemed to depress and irritate him.” An observer, Sir George Pollock, who had then

just been called to the bar, writes of "Carlyle in the agony of lecturing with firm-set mouth, painful eyes, and his hands convulsively grasped, suffering as one might fancy an Indian would at the stake" (*Personal Reminiscences*, vol. I, p. 177). He himself writes to Emerson: "I shall be in the agonies of lecturing! Ah me! Often when I think of the matter, how my one sole wish is to be left to hold my tongue, and by what bayonets of necessity, clapt to my back, I am driven to that lecture-room, and in what mood, and ordered to speak or die, I feel as if my only utterance should be a flood of tears and blubbing! But that clearly will not do. Then, again, I think it is perhaps better so; who knows?" (*Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerso.*, ed. Prof. Norton, vol. I, p. 156). It was better so, and he was persuaded in the end. "Detestable mixture of prophecy and play-actorism, as I sorrowfully defined it; nothing could well be hatefuller to me; but I was obliged. And she, oh she was my angel, and unwearied helper and comforter in all that; how we drove together, we poor two, to our place of execution; she with a little drop of brandy to give me at the very last, and shone round me like a bright aureola, when all else was black and chaos!" (*Reminiscences*, ed. Froude, vol. II, p. 187). Miss Martineau got together about two hundred friends who consented to listen to him discoursing on German literature, his favourite subject. This was the first course of lectures, and it proved a success, though Henry Taylor, who was present at the first lecture, had augured otherwise. Writing to Miss Fenwick on May 6, 1837, he says: "He was nervous in the extreme, insomuch that he told me nothing but the determination not to be beaten could have brought him through the first lecture. Nervous difficulties take much, of course, from the effect which they might otherwise have; but I doubt whether, under any circumstances, he would have much charm for a fashionable London auditory. He wants

all the arts and dexterities which might propitiate them. But though I fear he has no chance for much success, I think his *naïveté* and the occasional outbreaks of his genius and spirit will save him from being considered as a signal failure. His nervousness makes me dreadfully nervous in listening to him, so that I find it the greatest relief when he is done" (*Correspondence*, ed. Dr. Dowden, p. 81). As it does not appear that this course was reported in full by anyone, it seems to be now lost.

Encouraged by this success, his friends got up a second course. It was to be on the periods of European Culture and the History of Literature. The lectures were to be twelve in number, the subscription for each ticket being two guineas. They were delivered in 17, Edward Street, Portman Square, during the months of April, May, and June, 1838. The first lecture was given on Monday, April 30, and the rest on the succeeding Mondays and Fridays of each week. The portrait which Caroline Fox drew two years later of Carlyle as he appeared while lecturing is graphic, and may be given here: "Carlyle soon appeared and looked as if he felt a well-dressed London crowd scarcely the arena for him to figure in as a popular lecturer. He is a tall, robust-looking man; rugged simplicity and indomitable strength are in his face, and such a glow of genius in it—not always smouldering there, but flashing from his beautiful grey eyes, from the remoteness of their deep setting under that massive brow. His manner is very quiet, but he speaks like one tremendously convinced of what he utters, and who had much—very much—in him that was quite unutterable, quite unfit to be uttered to the uninitiated ear; and when the Englishman's sense of beauty or truth exhibited itself in vociferous cheers, he would impatiently, almost contemptuously, wave his hand, as if that were not the sort of homage which Truth demanded. He began in

a rather low nervous voice, with a broad Scotch accent, but it soon grew firm, and shrank not abashed from its great task" (*Journals and Letters*, vol. I, p. 182). Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton, too, was favourably impressed. "The most notable things in your way," wrote he to Aubrey de Vere in 1838, "have been Carlyle's Lectures; they have been perhaps more interesting than anything else, as all picturesque history must be, and he talks as graphically as his French Revolution. His personality is most attractive. There he stands, simple as a child, and his happy thought dances on his lips and in his eyes, and takes word and goes away, and he bids it Godspeed, whatever it be" (*Life of Lord Houghton*, by Mr. Wemyss Reid, vol. I, p. 220). But Carlyle struck another observer quite differently. George Ticknor, the American historian of Spanish literature, was in London while Carlyle was delivering his second course of lectures, and he thus writes of him in his journal: "He is a rather small, spare, ugly Scotchman, with a strong accent which I should think he takes no pains to mitigate. His manners are plain and simple, but not polished, and his conversation much of the severe sort. To-day he spoke, as I think he commonly does, without notes, and therefore as nearly *extempore* as a man can who prepares himself carefully, as it was plain he had done. He was impressive, I think, though such lecturing could not well be very popular; and in some parts, if he were not poetical, he was picturesque. He was nowhere obscure, nor were his sentences artificially constructed, though some of them, no doubt, savoured of his peculiar manner" (*Life of Ticknor*, vol. II, p. 180). "This time," says Mr. Froude, "he succeeded brilliantly, far better than on his first experiment." The money result was nearly £300 after all expenses had been paid,—a great blessing, as Carlyle said, to a man that had been haunted by the squalid spectre of beggary. But a greater blessing was that it had

a great influence on many men who have since become famous. Frederic Denison Maurice, another great 'guide of English thought in matters of faith' in this century, said that "he had been more edified by Carlyle's Lectures of 1838 than by anything he had heard for a long while, and that he had then the greatest reverence for Carlyle" (*Life of Maurice*, by his Son, vol. I, p. 251).

Well may Maurice have been edified, for apart from the subjective interest attaching to them, which must be very great, coming as they do from the most influential and original thinker of the present century in England, these Lectures are very important also for their subject-matter. This subject, which is the survey of European culture from its earliest dawn three thousand years ago down to our own century, including the literatures of every great European nation, ancient and modern, has been very sparingly treated in the English language. There are excellent works on separate periods of European literature, as Hallam's masterly work, and Mr. J. A. Symonds' *Italian Literature of the Renaissance*; again there are comprehensive histories of the literature of particular nations, as Ticknor's *Spanish Literature*, and Mr. Saintsbury's *French Literature*. But there is not a single work which within a moderate compass, or any compass at all, deals with the whole subject as Carlyle here does. The only work from which English readers can get a general view of the whole literature of Europe is the indifferent English translation of a foreign work, Frederic Schlegel's Lectures. Thus the present work can claim to be unique in English literature as regards its subject. Of course, within his very narrow limits Carlyle could not enter into details. But he has sketched the broad outlines in an incisive manner with a master's hand, giving the chief characteristics of each branch of European literature by picking out and treating at some length the most important authors and books.

At the outset of the lectures Carlyle disclaims forming any

theory of his subject, and calls all theorising futile. But his whole treatment is strongly tinged by his peculiar theories, two of these prominently prevailing above the rest. With him belief and faith is the one thing needful in human affairs, and disbelief and doubt the cancer of the mind eating all life and vigour out of it and paralyzing its activity. He judges periods and nations by this standard, and according as belief or doubt prevails, he praises or condemns them. In the history of European culture he views the steady progress of Belief, retarded at certain points by periods of Doubt and Unbelief. He sees in it, as he says, "a striking illustration of the ancient fable of the phoenix" (*infra*, p. 185). The system of belief which prevailed in ancient times gradually died out, and was followed by a period of scepticism and disbelief. Out of its ashes, however, arose Christianity with its new doctrine of belief; but this too in course of time grew effete; scepticism and disbelief gradually waxed stronger till belief seemed to have died out altogether in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a period represented in literature by the writings of Voltaire and the Encyclopædists in France, and the early writings of Goethe, notably *Werther*, in Germany. But again the phoenix rose from its ashes, and a new period of belief began with the beginning of this century, heralded by the later writings of Goethe.

The other theory which runs through these Lectures is Carlyle's well-known view that all great things are unconscious, expressed in Schiller's maxim that "true genius is ever a secret to itself." This is his measure of greatness. According as he finds a man unconscious or conscious of his greatness, he extols or condemns him. Homer is great because he was thoroughly unconscious of doing anything great when he composed his immortal poems. But Virgil, because he was striving in his *Æneid* to produce a great poem rivalling Homer's, is not really great; and is then truly great when he forgets himself most, as in his minor poems, which are

accordingly set above his epic. Shakspeare is truly great because he was supremely unconscious of writing anything that would live after him, and was merely labouring to keep himself alive in London by writing plays for the managers of the theatres; whilst Milton, proudly conscious of his own powers and bent on writing something which the world would not willingly let die, is pronounced a failure. By a wider application of his theory Carlyle comes to the conclusion that "during a healthy, sound, progressive period of national existence there is, in general, no literature at all," and that "it is not till a nation is ready to decline that its literature makes itself remarkable." For literature shows the nation's consciousness of itself, and this is fatal to its greatness. Whatever may be thought of this theory, an introduction to a posthumous work is not the place to criticise it. It is enough to draw attention to it.

In the notes I have verified Carlyle's references and corrected a few slips which he himself would have done had he published this work. References have also been given to recent works, where the reader who cares for more information on the subjects touched by Carlyle may find it. I have been sparing in referring to parallel passages from Carlyle's published works, as they are very numerous and as there is a good general index to these works through which the student can do this for himself. I cannot conclude without acknowledging my obligations to Mr. Henry Curwen, the Editor of the *Times of India*, for the great interest he has taken in this work from the beginning and for reading over the proof-sheets, and to his partner, Mr. C. E. Kane, for the facilities he has put in my way in the printing of the book.

INDEX.

- Addison, 155
 — and Erasmus, 124
 Æschylus, 29
 Alfred, 135
 Arabs in Spain, 98
 Bacon, 140
 Beatrice, Dante's, 88
 Belief and Unbelief, 53
 Berserkir, Story of the, 112
 Boswell, 160
 Cæsar's Commentaries, 41
 Calderon, 106
 Carlyle, first revelation of German literature to, 186
 —, his experience of German metaphysics, 189
 Carthaginians, 40
 Cervantes, 100—106
 — early life, 100
 — captivity, 101
 — poverty, 103
 — his *Don Quixote*, 103
 Charlemagne, 115
 Chivalry, 95
 — its origin, 96
 Christianity, Rise of, Tacitus on, 51
 — Progress of, 51
 — Contrast between, and Paganism, 5
 — a revelation of eternity to man, 57
 Christians—Pliny on the early, 61
 Church, the, 60
 — at the end of the Middle Ages, State of the, 117
 Cid, The, 98
Comœdia Divina—Dante's, 78—89
 — its character, 79
Comœdia Divina—*Inferno*, 81
 — *Purgatorio*, 86
 — *Paradiso*, 88
 Controversy, the leading feature of the 18th century, 151
 Crusades, 67
 Dante, 75—89
 — and the Papacy, 117
 — and Hume, 165
 Destiny, Belief of the Greeks in, 12
 — Belief of the Romans in, 38
 Diderot, 177
 Divination, Greek, not a quackery, 11
 Doctrine, Necessity of change in, 116
Don Quixote, 103
 Dryden, 155
 Elizabethan Age, 137
Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum, 126
 Erasmus, 123
 — early life, 124
 — his works, 124
 — resembles Addison, 125
 — Luther much greater than, 125
 Etruscans, 36
 Euhemerism, 10
 Euripides, 31
 Formalism and scepticism in the eighteenth century, 150
 Francesca, Story of, in Dante, 82
 Frans von Sickingen, 128
 French Revolution a violent reaction against scepticism, 183, 185
 — Literature, shallow, 150
 Goethe on Christianity, 67, 91
 — Werter, 171
 — Suicide, 172

- Goethe on Schiller's *Robbers*, 173
 — *Götz von Berlichingen*, 174
 — on *Unbelief*, 54
 — disease self-consciousness, 177
 — on the Diamond Necklace, 178
 — and the French Revolution, 179
 — and Shakspeare, 190
 — his Commentary on Shakspeare, 140
- Germans, early history, 111
 — Mythology, 112
 — Literature, 185
- Gibbon, 163
- Gravitation, 169
- Greece, early inhabitants of, 2
- Greek Religion and Mythology, 9
 — Speculation, 25
- Greeks, character of the, 6
 — their resemblance to the French, 7
- Gunpowder, invention of, 95
 — its beneficial effects, 95
- Happiness not essential to man, 187
- Herodotus, 26
- Hildebrand, Pope, 64
- Homer, 15—24
- Horace, 47
- Hume, 160
 — and Dante, 165
- Iliad, not the work of one man, 18
- Indulgences, 119
- Inferno*, the, 81
- Intolerance, 145
- Italians, early history, 73
 — Distinguished, 75
- Jean Paul Richter, 195
- Johnson, Samuel, 158
- Jury, Trial by, 113
- Knox, 142
- Leyden, Siege of, 109
- Liberty, True, 39
- Literature, its importance and power, 1
 — the sign of a nation's decline, 44
- Livy, 50
- Logic not omnipotent, 152
- Lope de Vega, 107
- Loyalty, 59
- Luther, 117—123
 — his character, 122
- Mahomed, 99
- Methodism, 153
- Middle Ages, Belief, the characteristic of the, 55
 — not literary, 68
- Milton, 146
 — and Dante, 147
- Modern Nations, formation of, 73
- Morals, Theories of, 167
- Mythology, explanations of, 10
- Napoleon, 181
- Nibelungen Lied, 70
- Niebuhr, 35
- Norman Conquest, 136
- Odyssey*, the, 21
- Oracle, Greek, not a fraud, 11
- Ovid, 48
- Paradiso*, the, 88
- Persian invasion of Greece, 4
- Peter the Hermit, 68
- Pope, Alexander, 158
- Printing, invention of, 94
- Progress, inevitable, 92
- Purgatorio*, the, 86
- Pyrrhus, 34
- Pythagoras, 25
- Religion, Greek, 9
 — Roman, 38
 — Christian, 57
- Robbers*, Schiller's, 173
- Robertson, 162
- Robin Hood ballads, Analogy of the Iliad with the, 18
- Roman religion, 38
 — Civilisation, Practical character of, 38
 — polity, 42
 — literature and language, 43
 — history, early, legendary, 35
- Rousseau, 178

- Saxons, 131
 — their fondness for the sea, 132
 — Characteristic myth of their crea-
 tion, 133
 — resemblance to the Romans in their
 character, 133
 — Conquest of Britain, 134
 Scepticism, 31, 54
 —, a disease of the mind, 166
 Schiller, 193
 Seneca, 48, 177
 Shakspeare and Goethe, 190
 —, an universal man, 139
 —'s unconsciousness of his greatness,
 141
 Socrates, 31
 Sophocles, 30
 Spain ruined by the Dutch War, 109
 Spanish Nation, early history of, 97
 — its romantic character, 97
 — its decadence unaccountable, 109
 Sterne, Lawfence, 158
 Swift, Jonathan, 156
 Sympathies, Adam Smith's doctrine of, 168
 Tacitus, 49
 Tacitus on Christianity, 52
 Themistocles, 28
 Theorising futile, 2, 166
 Thrift, 37
 Trial by Jury, 113
 Troubadours, 69
 Trouvères, 69
 Troy, Siege of, 3
 Ulrich von Hutten, 126
 Ulysses, character of, 22
 Unconscious, All great things are, 44
 Universities, Rise of, 93
 Vega, Lope de, 107
 Virgil, 45
 Voltaire, 149
 Worter, 170
 Werterism, 170
 — in England, 174
 Whitefield, 154
Wilhelm Meister, 190, 187
 Wit and Humour, 105
 Wolff's Theory of Homer, 16
 Worms, Diet of, 120
 "Worship of Sorrow," 57, 191