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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To discuss the essay in detail along with the analysis
- To discuss the background of the age when Carlyle wrote the essay
- To discuss the literary and critical output and effect of the essay

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Out of numerous worthy contributions in the field of historical essays by Thomas Carlyle, *On History* is an essay penned down by him in the span from 1830 to 1875. This period presents a major facet of his writings. It has been published across various editions as a part of his plethora of collection. These essays were originally collected in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*. Originally published in the year 1830 in Fraser's Magazine, this essay points down the key ideas about what an historian is expected to present, the histories' which have become important in the humankind.

His critically important pieces includes' works like "On History," "On History Again," "Count Cagliostro," and "The Diamond Necklace". The stellar works represents his detailed eye for minute information covered in his essays. It seems that he is not ready to accept the modern scientific history, but largely remains largely focused on the romantic historiography and events of historical significance.

4.2 ABOUT THE ESSAYIST

Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish essayist, historian and philosopher. Known as the Sage of Chelsea, he became "the undoubted head of English letters" in the 19th century. Carlyle was the eldest sibling of the nine children to parents James and Margaret Carlyle. He was born on 4th December, 1795 in a small village named Ecclefechan in Dumfriesshire in southwest Scotland. Though his parents were illiterate, Thomas was taught arithmetic by his father, and his mother taught him to read. His mother taught in the hope and expectation that Thomas would someday become a minister. But, unfortunately she was unable to witness the growing journey of his son due to her mental breakdown, twice. As a result, she had to be removed from the home. Carlyle remarks that his character has deep traces of his parents' upbringing.

As a result of the literacy provided by his parents and his interest in arithmetic, he gradually showed curiosity in languages like French, Latin and Greek and also learned them. He attended the Annan Academy from the year 1806 to 1809. In account of his continuous passion to keep moving forward, he attended the University of Edinburgh in the year 1809 and prepared for the ministry. He developed friendship with John Leslie, John Playfair and Thomas Brown in the university. He also championed in the subjects of mathematics and geometry, which led to the creation of the Carlyle circle. He worked as an academician in the same academy from 1814 to 1816 and then shifted to Kirkcaldy on the north shore.

Carlyle was detected with dyspepsia during his youth days, and this disease remained with him for lifetime. Being a voracious reader, he was exposed to the works of great German language writers, like, Friedrich Schiller, Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, etc, and eventually he acquired the working knowledge of the language. This led him to the profound religious experience, which resulted into his forsaking of atheistic attitude and realization of a deeper interconnectedness of the things existing in the universe, and this event finds a dramatized version in his work *Sartor*. The beginning of his career is marked by his contribution in *Edinburgh Encyclopædia* in the year 1820. In the span of 1820-1830, he turned towards the working in Germany, translated Goethe's great Novel, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Legendre's Elements of Geometry and Trigonometry. He published essays on German Literature in the journals like Edinburgh Review, the Fraser's Magazine as well as the Foreign Review.

The year 1833-34 witnessed the publication of one of his important works, *Sartor Resartus*, a combination of philosophy and autobiography. Hugely affected by the capitalist attitude of the bourgeois society, his work *Chartism* (1840) and *Past and Present* (1843) records this struggle

opposition. The latter book had been considered of prime importance by Frederick Engels. Throughout his literary career, all his works has a tinge of his disposition towards the disparities and differences prevailing in the society. Some of his important works are enlisted below:

1. The Life of Friedrich Schiller (1825)
2. "Signs of the Time" (1829)
3. The French Revolution (1837)
4. Sartor Resartus (1838)
5. Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (1839)
6. Chartism (1840)
7. On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History (1841)
8. Past and Present (1843)
9. Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches (1845)
10. Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850)
11. The Life of John Sterling (1851)
12. Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question (1853)
13. History of Friedrich II of Prussia: Called Fredrick the Great [6 volumes] (1858-65)
14. Inaugural Address at Edinburgh (1866)
15. Shooting Niagra (1867)
16. The Early Kings of Norway (1875)
17. Reminiscences (1881)
18. Reminiscences of My Irish Journey in 1849 (1882)
19. Last Words of Thomas Carlyle (1882)

1.3 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY

"History, as it lies at the root of all science, is ... the first distinct product of man's spiritual nature; his earliest expression of what can be called Thought. It is a looking both before and after; as, indeed, the coming Time already waits, unseen, yet definitely shaped, predetermined, and inevitable, in the Time come; and only by the combination of both is the meaning of either completed." (Carlyle, 1)

History, as revealed in his own words, by Carlyle seems to be an integral part and parcel for tracing down the history of any civilization and mankind. No tribe or no group of people are so rude that they do not attempt at presenting a picture of the history, in the views of the essayist.

In the words of Carlyle, *'A talent for History may be said to be born with us, as our chief inheritance. In a certain sense all men are historians.'* History in this sense becomes a very personal experience, which is reflected in all our joys and sorrows, all our conquests and losses finds a way, which is recorded annually and though not particularly mentioned. Carlyle further claims that-

'Our very speech is curiously historical, Most men, you may observe, speak only to narrate; not in imparting what they have thought, which indeed were often a very small matter, but in exhibiting what they have undergone or seen'. (Carlyle, 1)

We become what we have seen, observed and it becomes a way of conducting our lives, by representing, recording our highs and lows' and all of our shared knowledge. Knowledge, too, is nothing but a shared and recorded experience which includes all the essential elements including reason and belief mixed with action and passion.

Carlyle elaborates that the essential parts of history have always been ranked amongst the highest forms of art. Through a not so ordinary example of Minstrel and school mistress, Carlyle lays bare the point that initially history has the role similar to being a minstrel or story-teller who gratified our appetite for the wonderful, but the shift in the role is compared with it being a school mistress who professes to instruct the gratifying. *'Enough that all learners, all inquiring minds of every order, are gathered round her footstool, and reverently pondering her lessons, as the true basis of Wisdom...'* (Carlyle, 2). He is of the utmost opinion that History is a free emporium, where the poetry, politics, divinity and physics find a merger and thus, History serves the purpose of uniting all of them. *Examine History, for it is "Philosophy teaching by Experience"* is the message passed on through this whole example.

Carlyle imposes thought provoking argument that if History is the philosophy which teaches by experience, is History the sole source of providing the professed knowledge that we have or does it originate from other sources as well? Further, how much have we been profited by the same? The fundamental questions posed by the Philosophical historians about the course of the man's destinies on this Earth and to which direction they are tending. The answer in his words records that *'Before Philosophy can teach by Experience, the Philosophy has to be in readiness, the Experience must be gathered and intelligibly recorded'*. To say, it becomes a mammoth task to record and represent all the minute movements, resulting in it being either too easy or next to impossible task. *'Social Life is the aggregate of all the individual men's Lives who constitute society; History is the essence of innumerable Biographies.'* The social life always remains the undetachable part of any man's life. One can apply the hierarchy of man from people; people from society or vice versa to better understand the essayists' point. History becomes a testimony of innumerable biographies, an accumulation of the experiences and life events' that they have passed and lived through.

The author further notes an important point that the general internal life experiences remain same, but the only things which are marked in history are the variations and changes in the outward conditions of life. They find

a place in the historical books as they mark a deviation in the routine monotony of life. There is something in these external events that interest the readers of history, whether it is a joyous experience or a horrifying one. To put the words as appeared in the essay,

'The general inward condition of Life is the same in all ages; and that only the remarkable deviations from the common endowment and common lot, and the more important variations which the outward figure of Life has from time to time undergone, deserve memory and record'.

Carlyle very aptly poses questions about the parts of history which are important and which are forgotten. He asks that are the wars, the battles which places terror in every human heart, essential for history? Or does everyone remember the greatest innovator, or he who first led armies over the Alps, or gained victories of Cannae and Thrasymene, or the one nameless person who first hammered out for himself an iron spade? By Striking a wonderful example of comparison between an oak tree which makes the whole forest produce echo on its fall, and on the other hand a hundred acorns are planted silently by some unnoticed breeze. Similarly, the history and historical events follow this rule wherein seemingly inferiorly noticeable things are given high importance, wherein thousands of actually noticeable events are side- tracked to almost being next to nothing.

Commenting upon the laws and political constitutions, Carlyle is of the opinion that it is just a small part of our whole life; not our whole house but the bare walls of the house; and the other essential furniture is filled up by the inventions and traditions of long forgotten train artists and artisans of certain level *'who from the first have been jointly teaching us how to think and how to act, how to rule over spiritual and over physical Nature...'*

"Well may we say that of our History the more important part is lost without recovery; and- as thanksgivings were one won't to be offered "for unrecognized mercies" - look with reverence into the dark untenanted places of the Past, where, in formless oblivion, our chief benefactors, with all their sedulous endeavors, but not with the fruit of these, lie entombed."

By giving the example of Sir Walter Raleigh, Carlyle studs a point that even the history events recorded by the reporters and people concerned, was even worth it? Walter Raleigh's seeing outside from his prison window at some street stunt is recorded in three different ways by three witnesses, and all this three differs from the actual event. *'The real leading features of a historical Transaction, whose movements that essentially characterize it, and alone deserve to be recorded, are nowise the foremost to be noted'*. Carlyle has further arguments which proves that his historical approach towards the recorded events is quite deep. He argues that whence any event occurs, initially, there is wonder and

vagueness spread among the parties interested (the witnesses), which eventually converts into thousand Rumorous tongues. Further, the issue is settled on either of sides through the majority of votes creating epoch in the world's history, for example, "Crossing of the Rubicon," and "Impeachment of Strafford," a "Convocation of the Notables". If, at all, all these votes and experiences are wrong and the actual point lies far deeper, remains unnoticed, as no sensible mass had been present to witness the event, at the moment. *'Our clock strikes when there is a change from hour to hour; but no hammer in the horologe of Time peals through the universe when there is a change from Era to Era'*. *'It is, in no case, the real historical Transaction, but only some more or less plausible scheme and theory of the Transaction, or the harmonized result of many such schemes, each varying from the other and all varying from truth, that we can ever hope to behold.'*

Howsoever we try to justify the event, but our perceiving faculty will never be complete enough to provide a pure description. There lies a discrepancy in observing and their manner of happening. Our own impressions are merged with the observation and what we have recorded being a witness.

"..... actual events are nowise so simply related to each other as parent and offspring are; every single event is the offspring not of one, but of all other events prior or contemporaneous, and will in its turn combine with all others to give birth to new: it is an ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being, wherein shape after shape bodies itself forth from innumerable elements." The historian will depict this Chaos of boundless regards like the soul and destiny of man. The basic origin of any action by the humankind is Passion and Mystery, and when we dig deep into the lengths and breadths of the occurrence, it all travels towards one successive point denoting that: *'Narrative is Linear, Action is Solid'*. We try to investigate the different particles of the chain of events, unrealizing the fact that every chainlet of event is connected to one another; as a whole and it is not appropriate to study any of them in its solitariness. Each and every particle is part of the one Atom of events, thus breaking them only lets' us away from the actual truth, broadness. *'.....if History is Philosophy teaching by Experience, the writer fitted to compose History is hitherto an unknown man. The experience itself would require All-knowledge to record it - were the All-wisdom needful for such Philosophy as would interpret it, to be had for asking.'*

It is only through a clear reading and knowledge acquisition of the past that can lead us towards the Present and Future. History, intelligibly brought on a stand with the Palimpsest which once had prophetic writings, blurred but traceable letters, some words beyond our understanding; while some portions always remain undeciphered and beyond our observing capacities. For no Man can conceive the whole

ideal meaning of the entire History, it can be an effort, with maximum explorations possible.

- **Artists Vs. Artisans:**

“.....there are Artists and Artisans; men who labor mechanically in a department, without eye for the Whole, not feeling that there is a Whole; and men who inform and ennoble the humblest department with an Idea of the Whole, and habitually know that only in the Whole is the Partial to be truly discerned.”

To say, distinguishing between the artist and artisans, the former who ponders over the creation, has an eye for the beautiful and unusual, and the latter being the one who works mechanically without developing an appropriate eye for all the wonders of the art. The artist, is by no degree is an ordinary man, while the artisan in every possible way is next to being the very common way who only carves out the ordinary niche. What Carlyle intends to communicate is that the artisan is a mere labourer who does his labouring work and he cannot be blamed for unnoticing that there is a whole, whose part is performed by him. This realization of the uncountable and the whole can be only recognized by the artist.

By providing the example of a simple husbandman who by his gained knowledge of reaping and sowing does the work of checking the soil and getting his grain seeds planted, he becomes unaware of the celestial nature that helps it grow underneath the surface. Being a common tiller of land, he remains innocent but being an inquirer of nature, it is an deliberate ignorance of the beauty and wonders of nature that actually plays a role behind the curtain in the whole process.

“So likewise, is it with the Historian, who examines some special aspect of History; and from his or that combination of circumstances, political, moral, economical, and the issues it has led to, infer that such and such properties belong to human society, and that the like circumstances will produce the like issue; which inference, if other trials confirm it, must be held true and practically valuable.”

The class of people who watches the inscrutable Book of Nature as if it were a Merchant's Ledger, have probably never actually seen that book, or if seen, chances are that it would arise more errors than insight.

- **Historian vs. Gazetteer:**

The role of an historian in the building up of nation has always been considered of prime importance in its fullness. Right from the ancient times when it was the responsibility of the political historian to throw light on the happenings of the world, he is connected with a work which has involvement of people, nations, politics, economies and issues pertaining to growth and development factors.

What Carlyle suggests here is that usually the alleged historian, engrossed with the courtly affairs, worldly matters, battle fields and senate houses, he forgets that there is a world even outside this world. The true work of the historian is not and must not be limited to only recording the larger-than-life events, the events which are apparently noticed by a layman too. In the process of maintaining these all issues, somewhere he misses the small particularities happening around his surroundings. Like, the tumultuous tide of Thought and Action was still rolling upon, the world was still bright with the thousand valleys and with the existence of the earthly sun of happiness, and all this was taking place mindless of the fact that the famous battles were won or lost, who ruled which kingdom and who was the next heir of the throne.

The next that the author points is the fact that the person who has an eye only for the courts and camps, who has his interest only in the life and death figures of the soldiers, in the minister and the royal families is nowhere a historian, but a mere gazetteer.

“.....far away from such scenes the mighty tide of Thought and Action was still rolling on its wondrous course, in gloom and brightness; and in its thousand remote valleys, a whole world of Existence, with or without an earthly sun of Happiness to warm it, with or without a heavenly sun of Holiness to purify and sanctify it, was blossoming and fading, whether the "famous victory" were won or lost.”

Talking about the other kind of historian/s, Carlyle elucidates on the role of the Ecclesiastical historian, the one who is connected with the histories of the church and religion. The author particularly focuses on the role of this historian, as it is the inward condition of life which holds the centre of our being rather than the outward conditions of life. In the long run of life, it is not what he has acquired materialistically that will matter, but what he has contributed in the growth of his spiritual, religious well-being will salvage him at par from the other humans. It is the purification of the soul that is comparatively superior to the acquisition of wealth's, power, fame, glory or government.

“So that, for man's true advantage, not the outward condition of his life, but the inward and spiritual, is of prime influence; not the form of Government he lives under, and the power he can accumulate there, but the Church he is a member of, and the degree of moral elevation he can acquire by means of its instruction.”

Church and the history of church, the point where religion began to be followed by people, is what Carlyle talks about when he says about the Ecclesiastical historian. The history of church becomes important not only because it provides answers to the questions of why and when did masses follow it, but it also informs us about the connection we have established with our inner soul keeping in faith the outer, structured religious saints. The history gives us an idea of the Sacred books. But, what Carlyle finds faults with here is how much these historians have been able to personify with our inner peace rather than mere

objectification, just like the case with the political historian. Do the histories of religion really provide glimpse of our journey towards realization of our true beings, or it mere glorifies the tombs and churches, the saints and their lives, the pops and the prophets? Is it providing a sneak peek into the hearts of the human being which is the fountain of all kinds of manifestations? Probably not.

History of the Church becomes a combination of the Invisible as well as the visible church, and if both are not well- connected than it is but only a mere vacant edifice and nothing useful productive conclusions for the development of the humankind can be further sorted.

“The History of the Church is a History of the Invisible as well as of the Visible Church; which latter, if disjoined from the former, is but a vacant edifice; gilded, it may be, and overhung with old votive gifts, yet useless, nay, pestilentially unclean; to write whose history is less important than to forward its downfall.”

The history which falls under the category of being less ambitious according to the author is of Arts, Institutions, sciences, which are directly not connected to one other, but to some extent the result of each of them is invariably connected and affected by another.

The history of Philosophy has been given the stature of a parallelly important aspect, as the role of a priest and a philosopher stands at par as far as the impact on the humanity is concerned. It is the thought process and the outlook of the man which partakes him uniquely different form one another, which provides him the clear difference between the Universe visible and the invisible. It should be considered the soul of the worship for the body. But somehow, the roles and tasks of philosopher and priest have always been tangled and not arrived to an attainable goal as expected.

Art and literature are intimately connected to religion providing us a deep connection of the higher level of inner experience with the general levels of the outer surroundings. The poet who writes the history would consider the successful revelations of the inspiration obtained from nature, the point of origin of that beauty, which can be clearly perspectives of religion. We can decipher by the belongingness that man has felt with temple, how far they have been for shot or long periods, or have barely found any inspiration from it. No historian would be such who can be clear with everything. But the ideal always motivates oneself to reach towards the pinnacle of excellence.

The history of Laws and Constitutions have been found simpler in nature, whereas the history of Inventions like, the history of Medicine, of Mathematics, of Astronomy, Commerce, Chivalry, Monkery; and Goguets and Beckmanns is considered with a bountiful contribution. The

histories not discussed may not find a purpose in the discussion according to the author.

Thus, as described, all human action is extended three ways summing it up would provide a whole universe.

".. History strive by running path after path, through the Impassable, in manifold directions and intersections, to secure for us some oversight of the Whole; in which endeavor, if each Historian look well around him from his path, tracing it out with the eye, not, as is more common, with the nose, she may at last prove not altogether unsuccessful."

Exercise:

Answer the following questions based on the essay explanation:

1. Elaborate on the difference between A Historian and a Gazetteer.
2. Throw light on Carlyle's thoughts how the role of an Ecclesiastical historian is important.
3. 'A talent for History may be said to be born with us, as our chief inheritance. In a certain sense all men are historians.' Explain.
4. How does the social life and the inward condition of men affect the history?
5. Which events are worth recording from the huge canvas of history according to Carlyle and why?
6. Record the clear bifurcation between Artist and Artisans.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

A perfect blend of historical approach depicting the varieties of history, the essay is one of the finest works by Carlyle. Thus, this was the overall concept presented by the essayist in the essay.

4.5 KEY WORDS

Accumulation	the act of gathering or amassing together
Appetite	desire for hunger
Decipher	to decode, to find a solution to a problem
Deviation	the act of wandering off the correct or true path or way
Divinity	the state, position, or fact of being a God
Ecclesiastical	of or pertaining to the church
Elucidate	to make clear, to clarify, to shed light upon
Emporium	a market place or trading centre, particularly of an ancient city
Exhibit	to display or show for other to see, especially an exhibition or contest
Inscrutable	difficult or impossible to comprehend, fathom or interpret

Mammoth	something very large of its kind
Materialistically	in a materialistic manner
Minstrel	a medieval travelling entertainer who would sing and recite poetry, often to his own musical accompaniment
Monotony	boredom, tedium as a result of repetition or a lack of variety
Objectification	the process of objectifying something
Palimpsest	a manuscript or document that has been erased or scraped clean, for reuse of the paper, parchment, vellum or other medium on which it was written
Ponder	to wonder, think of deeply
Profess	to declare, to assert or affirm
Revelation	the act of revealing or disclosing
Reverent	showing or characterized by great respect, respectful
Rumorous	of the nature of rumours, circulated by popular report
Tumultuous	chaotic, disorderly, turbulent
Undetachable	that which cannot be separated
Vagueness	not clearly expressed, stated in indefinite terms

4.6 REFERENCES AND BOOKS SUGGESTED

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