CHAPTER V

1845

First Publications — Douglas Jerrold — *The Novelist and the Milliner—The Novel Blowers—The Universal Strike—Sleeping Beauty*

The period of silence which, partly, perhaps, in obedience to Carlyle's injunctions, partly through stress of occupation, Stirling had observed for some four years or so, came to an end in 1845—a year remarkable in Stirling's life for the amount and excellence of his literary production, and also for the appearance of his first published article. It was in that year, too—through the introduction of that first published article—that he came in contact with Douglas Jerrold. The circumstances are related in his *Essay on Jerrold*, published in 1868 :—

"The prospectus of the *Shilling Magazine* [edited by Jerrold] had reached me, busy with professional avocations, in the heart of the iron district of South Wales; and its calm, high, generous tone of universal sympathy, hope, promise, spoke at once to my inmost feelings. The first number corresponded to the promise of the prospectus, and I could not resist penning and transmitting an article to the editor. In a few days after the despatch of my paper, I was surprised by the receipt of a small note in a hand unknown to me—in a hand altogether unexampled in any correspondence I had yet seen. In motion evidently facile, fluent, swift—swift almost as thought itself—it was yet as distinct in its peculiar decisive obliquity as if it had been engraved—sharp and firm in its exquisitely minute fineness as if the engraving implement had been the keenest of needles. 'Surely,' thought I, 'the *Iliad* in a nut-shell is now conceivable.'

"It may readily be supposed that I opened and read this note with no inconsiderable curiosity. . . . There it lies before me, and all the emotions it excited are fresh

again within me—fresh as when, on the outside of that well-known post-office in that well-known Welsh iron valley, I first opened and read it."

Here is the little note, given in full—not with a blank for the name of the article offered, as it appeared in Stirling's *Essay*. To anyone who has had experience of the ways of editors, the emotions of surprise and gratification of the unknown young surgeon in the out-of-the-way Welsh valley, on receipt of such a note, will not appear by any means extravagant.

"*Jan.* 24,
WEST LODGE, PUTNEY.

"SIR,—I have the pleasure to inform you that your paper, *The Novelist and the Milliner*, will appear in the next number.

"Should you feel inclined to favour me with other papers, it will be desirable that I should have them as early as possible in the month.—Yours faithfully, DOUGLAS JERROLD."

Few indeed are the unknown, would-be contributors who have received such a letter as this—and at so short delay—from the editor to whom, in fear and trembling, if with eager hope, they have ventured to send their treasured MSS.! Stirling was keenly aware of the *unusualness* of so favourable a reception of an unknown writer by a well-known editor. He goes on to say :—

"What experience I had yet had of applications to the editors of magazines had been all so different, that surprise, on this occasion, could hardly yield even to gratification. . . . I had sent my article in the middle of January, and had expected no notice of my communication even in the February number. I had looked to the number for March as likely to contain the word of acceptance or rejection; and here, before I had even seen the advertisement of the contents of the new number, was a polite acknowledgment of acceptance from the editor himself, and with an invitation to send more!"

The article in question (*The Novelist and the Milliner*) appeared in the February number of the *Shilling Magazine*, and was followed, in May of the same year, by another of a kindred character—*The Novel Blowers, or Hot-pressed Heroes.* It is sixty-six years ago since those two papers appeared, yet, on reading them, one might well imagine that they had been expressly written by way of protest against an evil of the present day—the Sixpenny Shocker and the Penny Dreadful. They are, in fact, an *exposé* of the bad effects on character of the reading of cheap fiction—that is, so far as their *moral* is concerned; for in form they are, both of them, fresh, subtle, humorous sketches of character. In the first, we are introduced to the Milliner, or rather the dressmaker (the sex of the writer betrays itself in the incorrect designation, as well as in a few inaccuracies with regard to technical details!) after business hours :—

> "At shut of even and of shop—when work is done—when tired needles rest in pocket-books—when back-stitch and base-stitch, splay-seam and over-seam, cuffs, and ruffs, and muffs, and puffs, spencers and stomachers, are forgotten quite—when skirts and bodies, mantles, frocks, pelisses, finished or unfinished, thrust into half-open drawers, drooping from bed-post and from window-shutter, helpless over chairs, seated sinkingly beneath the table or upon, are all unthought-of and unseen."

Nervously exhausted with her day's toil, and sorely in need of rest, she yet cannot resist the attractions of the three-volume novel from the circulating library, though it rob her of hours of sleep, and strain the eyes already reddened and bleared with the demands of the day's work.

> "Sit you not there [it is the Novelist who addresses the Milliner], barely supported on the edge of your receding chair, with quivering feet upon the fender? Sit you not there, wide-kneed o'er the grate, unseen, at ease—with stooped head, flushed cheek, and glittering eye—turning so eager-rapid, with that yellow, needle-eaten finger, our

reddened, fair-marged pages . . . till even perfumes of burning worsted (for indeed, the flannel petticoat *will* take on process of eremacausis—slow combustion) can hardly bring you to your dim room and drooping-skirts again! And more; the fire extinguished (by the laying on of hands) . . . stir you not up the few red cinders, nervously, into hectic flushes . . . fitful, momentary gleams, which . . . give to sight the mystical inscriptions, then snatch them back to night again. Dash you not up then, passionately, in sudden burst of galled vexation, paroxysm of fret abruptly yielded to? Count you not, with hurried, shivering feverishness, how many chapters you have yet to read before the end may come? Dash you not down again, in dogged self-will, stooped head and flushed cheek placed defiantly on the very bars, resolute to master, ere the night shall end, our dear third volume?"

The dying-out of the last red flicker in the grate defeats her resolve; but even then, she does not retire to healthful sleep. She sits open-eyed in her chair by the dead fire, dreaming—"thin, wry-shouldered, red-eyed and angular," though she is—dreaming that *she* is herself the "lady fair" she has been reading of, and seeing herself in all the situations suitable for a heroine of romance! The vivid sketch which follows of the various and varied situations into which the Milliner's imagination leads her, affords a criticism of the different classes of fiction—the romantic, the sensational, the domestic—at the same time that it lays bare before us the character of the Milliner herself—her weak sentimentality, her small vanity, her little envies and jealousies. It is not till she hears the voice of the watchman beneath her window, "drowsily snuffling out half-past two," that she at length drags herself to bed, slipping beneath her pillow, "our dear third volume," which she hopes to finish in the morning.

"But, alas! you do but wake to find you have overslept yourself. Languid, worn-out, exhausted—even more so than at laying-by of the needle on the night before—to you slumber has brought no rest, repose no blessing. You

lie in sort of bitter-sweet prostration; sleepy, sleepy, but nervously incapable of sleep. You cannot rise; it seems as if some strange affinity—attraction—were glueing you to the bed beneath . . . and when at length, with sudden effort of the will, you . . . spring upon the floor, go you not about your little processes of dress drowsily and sulkily . . . empty of hope, heartless, comfortless, miserable? For to you, as virtually often to all of us, again has this life become a broken loop, a burst button-hole; or if not burst, not broken, to the loop there is no hook, to the button-hole no button."

In the *Novel Blowers*, the characterization is even more vivid, more subtle, than in the *Novelist and the Milliner*. That "long, irregular, unlicked Juvenal" seems to be placed alive before us, and all the wheels, and levers, and cranks of his inner mechanism exposed naked to our gaze. We watch him in his convulsions of adolescence—convulsions aggravated by a course of novel-reading—we smile at his *greenness*, his self-consciousness, his innocent egotism, his simple vanity, his susceptibility; his transparent artifices to attract the attention of the other sex, or to play the rôle of the hero of romance, move us to laughter. See him on board a steamer, for instance, "pacing heroically along and across, now larboard, now starboard, in full expectation of some huge adventure."

"Ha! already has he not formed an eye-acquaintance with that sweet young maiden? . . . Amorous Juvenal! how the heart wells up! What impulse is there not, lifting one soft arm round her neck, with beaming eyes and liquid voice to whisper wooingly, 'Maiden! Canst thou love?' But no: he feels that overmuch; yet see the battery of charms he opens on her! Those airs of herohood—that walk upon the deck, toes with due divergence outwards, and outer edge of heel set down accurately and firmly first—those bright eyes flashing on her ever as he passes—surely, all is irresistible! He mounts the paddle-box. True, brave youth, your figure shows in strong relief, and gallantly you front the blast; but on that high spot blows not the breeze somewhat familiarly against your pantaloons? Ah, now he descends! He loiters round the

funnel, evidently making preparations for a renewed assault. His courage is wound up: he turns; he mounts the quarter-deck; once more he stalks before the fair one, having dexterously opened out his upper benjamin, and folded down the collar gracefully, so that the trimmer form within now shines from the divided hull victoriously upon her. With a natural love to elevated places, he ascends by the man at the wheel, and standing there with folded arms, looks out upon the waste of waters: so stood Napoleon eager for the port of Frejus: so stood Columbus anxious for the land of prophecy."

The transitions of the "Juvenal" from pose to pose—from that of the "rapt poet lost in rich reverie," to that of the artist gazing with delighted eye upon the scene, or of the Byronic hero, sunk in gloomy thoughts, or the profound scholar, mentally tearing to pieces the book he is reading—are described with great freshness and humour, and show an intimate acquaintance with the symptoms of that disease to which fiction-fed youth is peculiarly subject—namely, enlarged egotism. The paper ends with this *envoi*:—

"Ah, yes! Society reels tipsily beneath our influence [it is the Novelist who speaks]; youth steeps in an enervating, disintegrating bath of novelism: and petty vanity, fostered in our guano compost, driven by our artificial, hot-house heat, has every puniest larva quickened to a caterpillar, till the very air is darkened by a pestilential cloud of butterflies, and heaven is hid."

It was probably in reply to a suggested offer of the *Novel Blowers* for the *Shilling Magazine* that Stirling received the following letter from its editor:—

"*March* 19,
WEST LODGE, PUTNEY COMMON.

"DEAR SIR,—It will give me much pleasure to receive anything at your hand—your articles on the influence of novelism certainly. I, however, feel it necessary for the increasing influence of the magazine (and it *is* increasing) to give as great a variety as possible to the contents. A reader will be attracted to a paper with a new title, which,

it carrying the same heading from month to month, he might turn from as monotonous. The 'to be continued' is, in my opinion, the worst line a magazine can have, if more than once in the same number. We, too, are limited for space; and must fight, as much as possible, with *short swords*. I merely say this much in the hope of inducing you to vary the titles of the papers you contemplate. I was very much struck with the peculiar freshness and vigour of your first paper: it had thought and sinew in it.

"What you write of the iron district is melancholy enough,—but I suppose, all in good time. What each of us has to do in his small sphere is to hasten the advent of that 'all' to the best of his means.—Yours faithfully,

"DOUGLAS JERROLD."

This is surely a somewhat remarkable letter for a new contributor to receive from the editor to whom he is known only by one article. The absence of all editorial airs, the frankness of the remarks on editorial business, the warmth and generosity of the praise bestowed on the work of his obscure contributor, and the naturalness and spontaneity of the word of practical wisdom with which the letter ends—all strike one as unusual. The qualities suggested by the letter—frankness, openness, naturalness, cordiality—were the same that appeared to Stirling most conspicuous in the *man*, when he had the good fortune to meet him.

"I[1] had only twice the pleasure of seeing Douglas Jerrold; the first time in May (I think) 1846, and the second time in April 1847. On both occasions I found him in that pleasant residence on Putney Lower Common, which his son so well and so lovingly describes. On the first occasion, his first words to me were, 'Why, I had you

[1] *Jerrold, Tennyson, and Macaulay*, p. 43.

in mind this very day'; and he proceeded to tell me of his newspaper, which he was then planning, and which made its *début* in the following July.[1] On both occasions he was as open, cordial, and unaffected as if it was an old friend he was receiving, and not a person comparatively unknown to him. He moved, talked, laughed in the most perfect spontaneity of freedom . . . he was a child of nature, as free, and frank, and unconstrained, and so as graceful as a child. . . . He chatted away, on the occasion I speak of, in the liveliest manner, gaily, frankly, unconstrainedly, and made no secret either of his thoughts and opinions, or of his predilections and antipathies. . . . During both visits, passages in his own history were as freely communicated as descriptions, anecdotes, and personal traits of his contemporaries. We talked of Carlyle: he could not say he liked his style, but he honoured him, for he was a man thoroughly in earnest, and had at heart every word he wrote. Did Carlyle come out among them? Yes: he was not quite an anchorite. He had met him at Bulwer's. They had talked of Tawell (the murderer of the day). He (Jerrold) had said something about the absurdity of capital punishments. Carlyle had burst out: 'The wretch! (Tawell) I would have had him trampled to pieces underfoot, and buried on the spot!' 'But I (Jerrold) said, *Cui bono—cui bono?*' This little anecdote made quite an impression on me . . . the whole scene flashed up vividly: the vehement Carlyle, all in fuliginous flame, and the deprecating '*Cui bono?*' of the astounded, not then vehement Jerrold; the stronger, broader conflagration appalling the weaker and narrower."

No excuse appears to be needed for quoting (again from the *Essay on Jerrold*) Stirling's description of Jerrold's appearance, and his account of their second, and last, meeting.

"Jerrold surprised me by the exceeding shortness of his stature, which was aggravated also by a considerable stoop. I do not think he could have stood much over five feet. He was not thin, meagre, or fragile to my eye, however. . . . Then the face was not a small one: he had a particular broad look across the jaw, partly owing,

[1] To this paper Stirling contributed, under the pseudonym of Fluellen, an article on the *Social Condition of S. Wales*, and two short papers on the *Welsh Utopia*.

probably, to the complete absence of whisker. The upper lip was long, but the mouth remarkably well formed; flexible, expressive, moving in time to every thought and feeling. I fancied it could be sulky, and very sulky too. But I said as much when I described his character as Scotch: for what Scotchman — ourselves inclusive — is not sulky? His nose was aquiline and *bien accusé*. His blue eyes, *naïfs* as violets, but quick as light, took quite a peculiar character from the bushy eyebrows that overhung them. Then the forehead, well relieved by the masses of brown hair carelessly flung back, was that of genius—smooth, and round, and delicate, and moderately high; for gigantic brows, colossal fronts, are the perquisites only of milkmen and greengrocers. . . . The second time I visited him he was kind enough to drive us (an American with weak eyes had dropped in) up to town. During the ride he was particularly chatty and agreeable. He told us of 'Black-eyed Susan' and Elliston; of his early marriage and difficulties. We had the anecdote of the French surgeon at Boulogne, who insulted his rheumatic agonies with '*Ce n'est rien*,' and got his retort in return. We had erudite discourses on wines, and descriptions of pleasant places to stay in. He told us his age. He talked of the clubs. He named his salary from *Punch*. . . . He chatted of Dickens, Thackeray, Leigh Hunt, Tom Taylor, and Albert Smith. Of all he spoke frankly, but discriminatingly, and without a trace of malice or ill-nature. In answer to the inquiry, 'What was Thackeray like?' he said: 'He's just a big fellow with a broken nose, and though I meet him weekly at the *Punch* dinner, I don't know him so well as I know you.' Dickens he mentioned with the greatest affection; and the articles of Thackeray and Tom Taylor were praised in the most ungrudging fashion. . . . And so we came to Trafalgar Square; and there we parted. I did not think then it was the last time I should see him . . . I did not think then that, returning from a six years' sojourn on the Continent, one of the first places I should visit in England would be Norwood Cemetery, to seek out there the grave of him who had once been kind to me."

When we read these extracts, we seem to be carried back sixty years, and to find ourselves beneath a literary firmament ablaze with stars of the

first magnitude, all of them at or near their zenith (for were not Tennyson and Browning, Dickens and Thackeray, and Thomas Carlyle all living, and in the full vigour of their powers?), and we are struck with the contrast between that splendid galaxy and the numerous little twinkling points of light which dimly illumine the dark skies that stretch above our heads in these later days.

To return to 1845 again, among Stirling's writings belonging to that year is his poem, *The Universal Strike,* the idea of which is the stagnation of all energy—moral energy. The poem falls into two parts — the first part written in Spenserian stanzas, the second in blank verse. It opens with an invocation to the muse, which in rhythm, and thought, and elevation of tone seems worthy to rank with the best of its kind :—

"O Muse! I too would sing. I, all untried,
Am passionate to don the golden woof,
And cleave Empyrean with a penn of pride.
Ah, let me! Be thou strong in my behoof!
Great are the souls that dare. To front the proof
Is glorious: and I, if but one spark
Of intellect I strike, fear not the hoof
Of malice. Let the crow croak! Hangs my mark
High; and I would trample only death and the dark."

But, even as he writes—even as he implores his muse—the mood of dejection assails the poet :—

"Big words, big words! All vanity! The weight
Why lift of work? O life! O weariness!
Far better were it not, inoccupate,
To dream, and dream, and dream, in idleness—
Dream after dream in large reposédness?
The air is heavy and my limbs are weak;
I cannot lift them—cannot bear the stress
Of movement. Stale the best and flat: why seek
Jargon's illimitable nothingness to eke?

Where is the worth of this great thing, a bard?
What use on earth the tuneful calling bland?
One line—one word is oftentimes more hard
To turn, than is the glebe beneath the hand
Of labour. See! Yon clown upon the land

> Hath cut the crop, gathered and bundled it,
> An ample store, sufficient to withstand
> The teeth of many living men; and yet,
> In the same time, these are the verses I have writ."

Then imagination, taking its cue from the mood of the poet, pictures the result of the universal adoption of such a mood—pictures a world in which all, animate and inanimate alike, should "dream, and dream, and dream in idleness"—and blank verse now takes the place of Spenserian stanzas. We can only here give a glimpse of some of the most striking points of the picture:—

> "Broods a horizon low, green, brown, morose,
> Over the sullen ice, moveless in block,
>
> . . . .
>
> Motionless by a rift, a bear, head down:
> Motionless over against, an Eskimo,
> His pointed hut slow-heeling over edge
> Of the dim universe, asleep in dream.
>
> . . . .
>
> The raft at its moorings will not even sway.
> The stream itself, as though with eyes abashed,
> Just slinks by the shut doors and windows blank
> Of smokeless cottages, nor lifts a gleam.
>
> . . . .
>
> The priest, with incense in his hand, has stopped,
> Sudden, by the altar, as though he asked
> 'What am I, then?—what is it that I do?'
>
> . . . .
>
> The sun glares in his place, and the white moon
> Stares back upon him, dull. The universe
> Folds into itself, sinking to the blank
> And all-devouring maw of nothingness."

But the poet rouses himself, shakes off his paralyzing torpor; and the world lives again; the *Universal Strike* has ended.

> "No! turns on its Æolian hinge the gate!
> Bursts forth into the blank the universe!
> The winds are joyous round the mountain-tops;
> The laughing sun plays with them. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> We live. Life, while we live, is glad and gay
> And sweet. Die when we may, most surely soon
> Will come the consummation: we shall see
> At last THE END within the hand of God."

This poem marks a distinct advance on any of its author's previous work. There is a dignity and majesty in the lines, and a maturity in the thought, for which we should look in vain in his earlier poems. In the conclusion in particular, we seem to catch a glimpse of the philosopher of twenty years later. Together with another composition (*Sleeping Beauty*) which belongs, in part at least, to the same year, *The Universal Strike* may perhaps not unfairly be said to represent Stirling in his best literary style.

Of *Sleeping Beauty*, Stirling says himself, in an Epilogue added to it in 1878, "I acknowledge myself to regard this writing as about my best," at the same time adding, "as respects thinking again, considerable correction would have followed" (had its author reproduced it in later years) of what "may only appear product of the heat and haste of youth." In both points of this judgment most critics would probably concur. If to a mature mind, the *motif* of *Sleeping Beauty*—the arraignment, so to speak, of the world of man for its apparent injustice, its inequalities, its high and low, and the passionate resolve to change all this, and to create a new and glorified universe—if this *motif* may appear young and immature, at least all must admire the remarkable beauty of the language in which it is embodied, and of the imagery with which it is adorned; all must appreciate the sympathy with the weak, the suffering, and the downtrodden which illumines it, and the love of the beautiful, the heroic, the sublime, which ennobles and exalts it. There are traces here of the Welsh experiences in the sympathetic, if perhaps somewhat highly coloured, pictures of the condition of the workers—especially of the miners, as represented by *Haiarno*, who toils day after day "chained in mountain-bowels—shut up with toads, and ravening rats, and dropping waters and exploding fire." It is Haiarno who

strikes, so to speak, the keynote of the overture to the piece :—

"'We lie all awry, twisted, contorted, crushing one another; and our eldest brother, Adler, with those, our brethren next to him, who have become his baser factors, flatterers, and followers, tread on us—but with a double hurt—to us first, but also to themselves. They bruise our head: we bruise their heel. O, mother, mother! why rear us up so numerous, and then die?'

"'Hush, Haiarno! our mother is not dead, but sleepeth.'"

Thus answers Ariel, who has "a tongue of fire, a brain of images, and a heart of dew." He will go forth and waken Beauty, his mother—their mother—the mother of Haiarno and the rest—and bring her back to dwell among her deserted children again. So he sets out; and his first joy as he finds himself alone with nature is thus beautifully described :—

"Boundless overhead stretched the blue heaven. The mountains rose before him *like an ecstasy*. The joy of solitude bubbled up within him. Exultation—inspiration—thrilled him like a presence. His cheek flushed; his eye lightened. He trode upon the winds—he gesticulated—he cried aloud in transport. Unutterable thought found vent in rhapsody. . . . The pebbles in his path, that looked so clear in the keen air, he threw with wild strength on and on before him, still following eagerly with speed to see what mystery they might chance to light on."

But by-and-by the ecstasy of the outsetting gives place to dejection and despondency, and voices of doubt and despair "swooped round him like an exulting, overtaking multitude." The whole face of the universe is changed.

"Coldly stretched the firmament above his head in blank monotony, nor showed one sign of sympathy. He heard a lifeless rivulet purl on. He saw the wide, bare heath, and the *unmeaning sun*. Then Ariel stood upon his feet and shrieked into the air: 'Father! Father! am I thy son?' . . . *Silence, like an upstartled hound, skulked sulkily to its place again.*"

It is impossible to quote here all the fine literary touches in this beautiful piece; but one or two points cannot be passed over without mention—the beauty of the passage in which Ariel is described as catching a glimpse of the fringes of the mantle of Beauty, his mother, and of pursuing in passionate haste; and the characterization of those others whom he meets engaged on a similar quest to his own. The old man "with stately, self-complacent pride of aspect," and "voice musical, of serious ecstatic tone, rising on a swell of simple yet somewhat stately melody," is of course Wordsworth. The fair boy sitting before the "wondrous forms"—"enormous bulks of heroes," "images of man, and beast, and mighty god"—could only be the marvellous author of *Hyperion;* while the "slender youth," "drooping from a little skiff," "emaciated and grey," "with such a face of sorrow," is none other than Shelley.

When we consider that this piece, along with *The Universal Strike*, *The Novelist and the Milliner*, the *Novel Blowers*, and one or two smaller pieces, was the work, during one year, of the leisure hours of a young doctor in active practice, it will readily be admitted that the year 1845 was indeed a memorable one in the life of the author.

CHAPTER VI

1846-1851

Professional Work—*Letters on Carlyle*—Epidemic of Cholera—Stirling's Treatment of it—*The Common-sense of Cholera*

FEW young doctors have probably ever had so heavy a responsibility laid upon them as that with which Stirling found himself confronted when, in 1846, he became sole surgeon to the Hirwain iron-works. In the works, where hundreds of workers were employed in various ways, and machinery of all sorts was in use, accidents were of course of frequent occurrence; and in dealing with the sufferers, Stirling could look for help to absolutely no one. There was no hospital, provided with appliances and instruments for surgical operations, to which the injured could be conveyed; there was no doctor within miles whom he could summon to his assistance. In every emergency he had to rely on his own resources; and often he had to make up, by ingenious contrivances of his own, for the lack of the usual instruments or appliances which were not at hand in the Welsh valley. On one occasion, through some accident in the works, a man had his hip-joint dislocated. In a modern, well-equipped hospital, which would doubtless contain a special instrument for the purpose, the replacement of the joint might not be regarded as a serious matter; but Stirling was without help, either human or mechanical, and, as will readily be understood, even of mere physical strength, more was required for the operation than he possessed. By means of a rope and a heavy piece of furniture, in the dingy little room in which the injured man

lay, he contrived a sort of pulley, and instructed a neighbour to pull the rope at a given signal, while he himself, his hands on the patient's limb, directed the force of the improvised machinery. This ingenious contrivance proved successful!

Of course, accidents in the works were far from being the only emergencies which, as the only doctor for many miles round, Stirling had to meet unaided. One of the multifarious duties of the young surgeon was to relieve the sufferings of toothache by removing the cause. For this purpose he possessed an instrument of torture called a key, on his skill in the use of which he particularly prided himself; and in later years he was very pleased if any member of his family would give him an opportunity of once more exhibiting it. "Toothache?" he would exclaim, in a tone that sounded to the sufferer offensively cheerful. "Have it out!" And before you knew where you were, you were seated on the floor in the "study," with the operator on a chair at your back, fixing the instrument of torture on the offending tooth. Then there was a delicate turn of the wrist on the part of the operator, an awful crash on the part of the patient; and the tooth was triumphantly exhibited to the latter in the iron jaws of the "key," instead of in his own. It was very skilfully and cleverly done; but the next time you had toothache, you took care not to mention the fact in the presence of the head of the house!

Possibly Stirling's Welsh patients were more Spartan than his later domestic ones; for it is a fact that, when it was known that he was leaving the iron valley, people from miles round, even though not suffering from toothache, came to him to have decayed teeth removed, in the fear that his successor might not be such a skilful extractor! It must be admitted, however, that his reputation as an extractor was sometimes won by methods which

cannot unfairly be called theatrical! On one occasion, he had mounted his horse, and was about to set out on his morning round of visits, when he was accosted by an old man, with his hand to his mouth, uttering cries of pain mingled with, "Doctor, doctor!" Unwilling to dismount and return to the surgery, Stirling stooped from the saddle, and felt the offending tooth, which was somewhat loose. "Have you a handkerchief?" he said to the man (in Welsh); then, with the square of coloured cotton the other handed to him, he took a firm hold of the tooth, and lightly pressed his horse's sides with his spurs. The next instant the surgeon was some yards off, riding cheerfully on his way, the tooth lay on the ground in the red bandanna, and the patient was left standing, lifting up his hands and his voice in awe and wonder at the magical feat which had been performed!

It must not be supposed that Stirling usually took his "cases" as lightly as the one mentioned above; the truth is that his responsibility usually lay very heavily on him. He has often been heard to tell of his agony of mind during an epidemic of a peculiarly severe form of scarlet fever, against which he found all the known remedies almost powerless; and how, when he saw the funeral procession of one of the victims approaching, he would take shelter behind a wall, or anywhere out of sight of it!

It will be remembered that the year when Stirling began practice in Hirwain was that of the failure of the potato crop in Ireland, when hundreds of people were starving. The bad season which caused famine in Ireland was not without its evil consequences in Wales also. For several springs following it, the inhabitants of the iron valley were, many of them, in a condition of scurvy—"actual sea-scurvy, not a scaly skin merely, but black, hard, crippling swellings on each leg, terminating in

ulcers, blue, swollen fungus gums surrounding loose teeth, pallor and prostration, and hæmorrhage from every outlet." The ordinary table vegetables being almost unprocurable at the time, and lime juice hardly to be had in sufficient quantities, Stirling used to order the sufferers from this unpleasant malady to gather nettles, and have them boiled, and eat the water they were boiled in like soup.

In spite of its anxieties and responsibilities, Stirling's life in Wales was not without its pleasures. He was young and healthy; it was a joy to him to come out in the bright, fresh morning, "throw his leg across his horse," and set out on his rounds, which often took him along rough bridle-paths, up among the hills, where he was alone with nature, and free to think his own thoughts, and dream his dreams. The absence of good roads, and the consequent necessity of employing the horse-and-saddle as a means of locomotion, were reckoned by him as among the advantages of his position in Wales.

In 1849 he received the appointment to a practice in the Vale of Neath, where he remained till 1851. It must have been while living in the Vale of Neath that he wrote his three *Letters on Carlyle*, which appeared in a now defunct magazine, *The Truth-Seeker*, under the pseudonym of "Caliban." The "letters" are written ostensibly in reply to a friend who has ventured to express a somewhat unfavourable opinion of the Chelsea Sage—chiefly on account of his "style"—and they constitute a passionate defence, or, rather, a glowing eulogy, of the man who was still, to the writer of the letters, prophet and master. Reading the letters now—in these coldly critical, or apathetically indifferent, days—one is startled by the boldness, no less than by the generous warmth, of the praise bestowed on Carlyle. The writer seems unable to find words strong enough, or ardent enough, to express his admiration

of, his sense of gratitude to, the author of *Sartor* and the rest. Take, for instance, this passage from the second *Letter*:—

"I tell you that there is here once more a man of the highest order—a man whose intellect has seized all the meaning of the past, and all the meaning of the present—a man who, in things admitted and allowed, has manifested and made evident to all a faculty of such rare truth and trenchancy of stroke as compels a credence to him in things remoter—a man of the most overflooding and overwhelming honesty—a man of the fiercest, keenest indignation against wrong and injustice . . . I tell you, you *must* believe in him . . for just as sure as there is a sun in heaven, such a man as this *can* only be, must be, and is, a Messenger from the unseen Father to the erring and rebellious children."

Or this from *Letter III.*:—

"That Carlyle does possess this super-eminent importance as a writer, I think a brief glance at those six pamphlets[1] alone will go far to establish. You have called him a negation only; but, reflect! is he then no more than that? . . . Is his rationale of the confusion of 1848, revealing, as it does, its essential nature to the very core, negative only? Is the organization of purposeless pauperism into effective industrialism negative only? . . . Is his doctrine of Chastisement negative only? Colonial Policy, Socialism, Education, the Church, Commercialism, the Press, Parliaments, Nobles, Freemen, Kings—here surely are some of the most important topics that man or men can think of now . . . in regard to which of these topics have we not gained from Carlyle the clearest and most positive insight?"

Elsewhere, in the *Letters*, Carlyle is spoken of as "the master," the "Norse Prophet," as "in reality our beginning, our middle, and our end." Any author might well be satisfied to meet with *one* disciple so able, so sympathetic and so admiring as the writer of those *Letters!*

Stirling's own copy of the *Letters* affords

[1] *Latter-day Pamphlets.* The third of the *Letters on Carlyle* appeared in September 1850—the year of the publication of the *Latter-day Pamphlets.*

evidence that, at a much later period, he endorsed the estimate of Carlyle given in them. Beneath the signature "Caliban" of the last letter there is written in the writer's own hand, "Bravo! 1865." Beneath these words again, in writing that suggests a period forty years later (probably one of the early years of the present century), he has added: "After a life-time it is only the true thing to say that, even then as he wrote, not one word Messiah-wards was ever for a moment a matter of denial by the writer."

While he was writing the *Letters*, Stirling was still occupied with his professional duties; and in the year in which they were published, he was confronted by circumstances which called upon all his resources, physical as well as intellectual. It was in that year (1850) that South Wales was visited by an epidemic of cholera of a virulent order; and, as the sole doctor for miles round, he had to combat it single-handed. It was a terrible time; and the young doctor was kept so busy, as one after another of the people in his charge was seized with the awful malady, that he could hardly get the necessary bodily rest himself. To allay the panic which the fear of infection at first excited, he took his young wife (he had recently been married) to a cottage where a sufferer had been left deserted; and she even helped to rub the cramped sinews in arms and legs, which constitute one of the most painful symptoms of the disease. The object-lesson had its good results; even the Welsh miners had sense enough to know that the doctor would not take his beautiful young wife into the presence of the malady, if he feared infection; and in future the sufferers were not deserted.

One incident of the cholera epidemic, related by Mrs Stirling, may perhaps be found interesting in these days when we hear so much of the power of lactic acid. An old woman, who lived alone, being

seized with the prevailing malady, shut herself up in her hut, refusing to see a doctor, and treated herself with copious draughts of butter-milk, which —so she said—effected a complete cure! It is true at least that she did not die at the time of the epidemic, but whether or not hers was a case of genuine cholera must remain uncertain.

It is very gratifying to know that Stirling's unsparing and intelligent exertions in combating the terrible epidemic were rewarded with remarkable success, and received due recognition. While, in the district next to his, hardly a single person survived who was attacked by the malady, of his own patients by far the largest number recovered—all, in fact, to whom he had been called at a sufficiently early stage of the disease; and when the epidemic had passed, the Board of Health awarded him a special vote of thanks for his successful treatment of it. Some four years later he published a little pamphlet (long since out of print), entitled *The Common-sense of Cholera*, which is, in many ways, surely the most remarkable *medical* treatise ever written! It is remarkable not only for the literary style, unusual in medical works, in which it is written; not only for the tone of authority, strange in an author who signs himself only *A Practical Practitioner;* but perhaps most of all for the evidences throughout of *the philosophic mind*—the mind that goes to the root of the question, that grasps its subject, as he would himself have said at a later day, in its *concreteness*, not *abstractly*. The pamphlet, as has been said, being out of print, perhaps an extract or two, illustrative of what has been said, may not be out of place :—

"Well, will voluminous reports, eloquent perorations—mere self-satisfied beatings of one's own drum—suffice to extirpate cholera while large masses of the community are to be found dragging on existence in such a condition of bodily—and, if of bodily, surely then also of spiritual—

disorganization and dissolution? And that such is the case, not in trope but in truth, our own personal experience of the Welsh workmen and the Irish navvies amply establishes. Nay, to leave the workmen, does the Board of Health expect that such measures will extirpate cholera, while the very masters are permitted to exist in the condition in which they are but too generally found? For the pimpled wine-skin, the coarse vulgarity of tongue, the profuse polygamy, the blown arrogance, the insolent emptiness that all of us have met, is it but an exceptional disguisement, then, or a natural and inevitable transformation? What single noble object is in all that mighty traffic? . . . Masters—men of perseverance, men of skill, to lead numbers of their fellows in some noble industry—such masters are they? No; knowing but one principle—to get the most for the least—and driven by that principle, however rich they be, however eminent they be, into the most systematic adulteration of every article they deal in, from pipe-clay and shoe-blacking up to vast railways and huge bridges, they are but too commonly, even as the men they drain, morally and bodily, wrecks. Master and man, then, in such condition, is it by polite inspectors and conventional Blue books that the Board of Health will extirpate cholera? Never. We call, then, to you, the separate and individual members of the Board of Health, to bethink and bestir yourselves; to understand fully the whole scope of your function, and to do what in you lies to accomplish it. Extensions of power, additions of power, no doubt require to be demanded: demand them: to that your duty imperatively bids you. To you by the great British nation is a mighty function delegated: to the great British nation you are a Board of Health: be then a board of health, and give us health!"

There is more in the same vein which might be quoted, but perhaps the above extract is enough to confirm what has been said above regarding the tone of authority in which this unknown Practical Practitioner writes. Since the days when it was said of the Greatest who ever walked this earth that "He spake as one having authority," there has been no surer mark vouchsafed to us of the bearer of a message than this very tone of authority—when it rings true, as it undoubtedly does in this little

medical treatise, and in its author's later works. As yet, of course, Stirling's message had not become explicit to himself; but those who are familiar with his philosophical writings will find it implicit—in part at least—in the following extract from *Cholera*:—

"It has come out of late, however, and there are certain statistics to prove, that not the animal and sensual conditions only, but also the moral and intellectual are necessary to the procurement of health and the certioration of longevity. Our model man, therefore, shall know that skin, stomach, lung, that nerve, muscle, sense alone suffice not, but, to the magic circle which should round existence, the heart, the mind, the soul, are necessary. For the heart, then, he shall find the aliment of the affections. He shall know the richness, the fullness of life secured to a man by a good wife and loving children. He shall have a friend, too, or friends, and know the clear deliverance of a full communion. He shall have sweetened himself by charity; he shall have meekened himself by resignation; he shall have calmed, cleared, confirmed himself by love—by forgiveness, not of the big malices alone, but of all the petty spites and slights that barb existence. Neither shall the due aliment, the due vital conditions of the mind be wanting. He shall search, and think, and speculate; for the heavens are questions to him, and the earth and man. He shall widen and illuminate his intellect by the knowledge of his times. He shall purify and fortify the God within him by the study and imitation of the wise, and good, and great, who have gone before him. He shall be religious, too: for as affection to the heart, and its own exertion to the mind, so to the soul, which is the inmost entity, the depth of depths, religion—religion which is the sum of all, the flower, the crowning, ultimate, and essential fruit, to which the rest are but as root, and stem, and branches. . . . He shall have made plain to himself the probationary—and even, perhaps, the pictorial—condition of this world, the certainty of a God, the necessity of a future existence, and, thus inspirited and inspired, his whole life shall be a peaceful evolution of duty. He may have fed upon the scepticism of his times; but he shall have healthily assimilated it. He shall have recognized the *thinness of its negation*, the pretension of

its pedantry, the insufficiency of its material hypotheses; and the great mystic, spiritual truths shall shine out to him, even as to them of old, undimmed, unveiled, unremoved by any of them."

Surely this is a remarkable passage to be found in a little pamphlet treating of a special malady! To those who are familiar with Stirling's later writings, that phrase "thinness of its negation" in this treatise of the young doctor must appear curiously characteristic of the future philosopher. Already he had caught a glimpse of the foe, so to speak, in combating which he was, later, to spend so much of his thought and energy; but he had not yet learned to name it *Aufklärung*. The passage is characteristic, too, as was said above, in its *concrete* treatment of the subject under discussion. The subject is, as we know, cholera. One writer would have given a learned disquisition on the cholera bacillus, with diagrams taken under the microscope; another would, perhaps, have denounced the insanitary physical conditions which had given rise to the malady, and suggested improvements; a third would have contented himself with describing with minute accuracy the various phases of the disease; a fourth might have related his own experience, and treatment, of a case; while the Faith Healer, from *his* abstract standpoint, would have declared the others were all wrong in dealing with disease as if it were a bodily thing—that it was the mind of the patient which must be addressed through "suggestion." But Stirling was a philosopher as well as a practical physician; and he did not deal in abstractions; he looks at his subject from all the points of view indicated above, except, perhaps, the first. To him a patient was more than a "case"—more than liver, and stomach, and lungs, and heart—he was that highly complex thing, a human being, a member of that still more complex thing, a human community.

This distinction of *abstract* and *concrete* is one very frequent in Stirling's philosophical writings; and his readers must be familiar with his condemnations of merely abstract, or *formal*, right, and the merely abstract individual—that is, the person who looks at a question of right or justice *in abstraction*, apart from the concrete facts, circumstances, elements, which condition it. "So it is," he says in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Law*, "that we find the individual who only fixes himself in his *right* for the most part so thin and narrow. We see also that it is generally the rude and unformed man who so stubborns himself in his abstract right, while the richer, fuller nature has an eye for every side of the interest at stake, and has no difficulty in complete resignation of his abstract right." It is in the same *Lecture* from which this sentence is quoted that there occurs the following illustration of abstract right, and an abstract individual, which will make the distinction clearer than any amount of explanation:—

"I recollect of a case, indeed, where a poor man nearly ruined himself by the consistency of his faith in formal or abstract right. He was the landlord of a workshop; and the tenant, without consent asked or given, took it upon him to enlarge the old windows in this workshop, and open new ones. 'The workshop is mine,' said the landlord, 'and you have infringed my rights.' 'But what I have done,' said the tenant, 'I have done at my own expense; and what I have done is an improvement to the property.' 'I admit that,' said the landlord, 'but you had no right to make alterations in *my* property without *my* consent, and I will take you to law there*for*.' Accordingly, this landlord did take this tenant to law; he lost his case before judge after judge; and he was just on the point of taking it to the House of Lords, when death kindly stepped in; and by *its* abstraction did justice to *his*."

This distinction of abstract and concrete had not become explicit to Stirling at the time of writing the *Cholera* pamphlet; but that he had himself

reached concreteness—the result of experience—is obvious from the pamphlet itself. The little medical treatise, in fact, marks another stage in the intellectual development of the future philosopher, which it is part of the object of this memoir to trace. He is now on a totally different, and much higher, plane than the young man who wrote to Carlyle that he was afraid of "medicine strangling literature." That young man was still *abstract*, lop-sided. He possessed, it is true, "a real power of Vorstellung," which is, as we have seen, "the key to mental power"; but that power was only as yet "formal"—it was without "filling," as Stirling would himself have said.

Thus is the wisdom of Carlyle's advice to "keep by medicine" vindicated. Stirling has kept by medicine; and through it has been brought in contact with the great realities of life and death—through it, he has obtained his "filling," and attained to concreteness. He is now a man *teres totus atque rotundus*.

CHAPTER VII

1851—1857

Death of Stirling's Father—Paris—The *Coup d'état*—Life in France—Letter from Carlyle—*Burns in Drama*—Heidelberg—Hegel

To fit him for the life-work which awaited him, what the future philosopher at this period required was leisure to enable him to devote himself to a special and profound course of study. Nature had given him the necessary mental power; in Glasgow University he had obtained the requisite general intellectual training; in Wales, through his contact with his fellow-creatures, and his struggles with suffering and disease, he had acquired that without which mere intellectual power is practically valueless—namely, *substance*, concreteness. All that he now required was an accurate knowledge of German, and a close study of philosophy—especially the philosophy of Hegel. Just at the psychological moment, the means to secure the necessary leisure were put within his reach. On the 14th March 1851 his father died in his seventy-fourth year, leaving what in those days was regarded as a considerable fortune.

Besides the future philosopher, only one son and the sole daughter survived their father; and as no will was found, the estate was, by general agreement, divided equally between the three, except that the daughter received, in addition to a third of the money, the house and furniture.

Even perhaps in 1851, certainly in these present days of luxurious living, few men would have regarded the modest patrimony, of which Stirling

now found himself in possession, sufficient to retire upon; but the future philosopher had no ambition to make a showy figure in society, and the sum which he had inherited appeared to him enough to maintain him and his family in comfort and independence, while he devoted himself to intellectual work. Accordingly, in the summer following his father's death, he resigned his appointment as surgeon, and resolved to spend some years on the Continent, with the object, partly, of making himself familiar with French and German. Not yet had he definitely resolved to devote himself to German philosophy, though he had already, as he tells us in the Preface to the second edition of the *Secret*, seen the name of Hegel in a review, and been "somehow very peculiarly impressed by it." Nevertheless, as he left his native country for the Continent, he was unconsciously obeying the call of his destiny—unconsciously moving towards the discovery of his life-work, though some years were even yet to pass before he reached it.

That he had not yet reached it is proved by the fact that his destination, in the first place, was not Germany, but France. After a brief stay at Boulogne, he and his wife settled in a furnished *appartement* at 41 Vieille Route de Neuilly, Paris, where they remained for some eighteen months.

It was at a critical period in the history of France that the future philosopher and his wife took up their abode in the capital. Little more than three years before (in February 1848) the king, Louis-Philippe, had been driven from the throne by a revolution—the third in less than sixty years!—and France had again become a republic, with Louis Napoleon, nephew of the great Bonaparte, as its President. During the three years of its existence the Government had not proved entirely satisfactory; there was constant friction between the President and the Assembly, and

about the time when Stirling arrived in Paris, it was becoming evident that a change of some sort must take place. Before the end of the year 1851, the change took place with startling suddenness; and the future philosopher had an opportunity of witnessing history in the making. Sudden though the change appeared to be to outsiders, it had been preparing for some time back. For some time Louis Napoleon, in council with a small group of friends and supporters, had been planning the *coup d'état* by which he was to crush those who opposed him, and raise himself to the position of ruler of France. On the 2nd December the stroke fell; and in a letter to his brother some three days later, Stirling gives a vivid account of what he himself saw in Paris. Here is the letter:—

"41 Vieille Route de Neuilly, Paris,
Friday, *Dec.* 5, 1851.

"My dear Brother,—Yours dated the day of our new *coup d'état* reached me duly yesterday; and I have waited till to-night to have more news for you.

"As I went in the omnibus on Tuesday the 2nd on my way to the schools,[1] I was struck by seeing groups round placards, and then, in crossing the Place de la Concorde, I was surprised to find it covered by troops. Then our omnibus was not allowed its usual route over the Pont de la Concorde, but had to turn and go over the Pont des Invalides; and then I observed the steps of the façade of the Chamber of Deputies covered with soldiers. All this, and the excited aspect of the streets, made me see something was up; and I thought to myself the likeliest thing would be that Louis Napoleon had just turned the

[1] He was attending lectures at the Sorbonne and the Collége de France.

Assembly out. So it was. When I got down from the omnibus, I had the opportunity of reading his proclamations to the people and to the soldiers, my internal comments on which I shall not write here. I found the lecture I wanted to hear put off; so I made my way down the Place Concorde again. I crossed the bridge next (on the Tuileries side) to the Pont de la Concorde; and when the soldier sentrying it there allowed me, I had an opportunity of seeing the troops by the Chamber of Deputies, and how that building was made fairly inaccessible by troops barring every avenue. I went along the river side to the Place de la Concorde; and had an opportunity of enjoying the excitement of the people. The affair was really a kind of a god-send, for it brought out again all the beautiful forms and faces that the bad weather had so long deprived us of. There they were, smiling and chatting, all in a state of exhilaration that I had to participate in. It looked like a piece of fun; and they seemed to make it quite a piece of fun by experimenting on the ways which were barred, and those which were not. '*Peut on passer par ici?—Hé bien! par là, donc!*' Then the troops with their arms piled, etc., etc., and on such a place as the Place Concorde it was really very fine.

"By-and by, I was told of the long list of great men who were arrested;[1] but that I *would* not believe. Next day, Wednesday, I walked in pretty early to the Boulevards: everywhere groups, everywhere sergents-de-ville, everywhere soldiers. At the foot of the Faubourg Poissonnière there was a considerable crowd which, in spite of exhortations from individuals, '*Ne courez donc pas!*' did run from some sergents-de-ville on the pavement, and some soldiers on the causeway. I had put my back to one of the urinals (you know), and as the sergents

[1] The members of the Opposition in the Assembly, who actually *were* arrested in their beds by the orders of Louis Napoleon.

came up, I walked across the cleared space without anyone speaking to me. Presently, however, I found a fair *cordon* of soldiers across the Boulevard, and had to make a circuit by some other streets to gain the Boulevard further on. I passed the Porte St Denis, went on to the Porte St Martin, the street of which name I descended, turning into the Rue Rambuteau towards the Pointe St Eustache, the Rue St Honoré, the Place du Carrousel, and eventually home by the Palais Royal, the Rue Vivienne, and the Boulevard again.

"Yesterday, Thursday, I was on the Boulevard as far as I could get—which was only to the Rue de la Michodière, just by the beginning (I think) of the B. des Italiens. There, at a very little distance from me, I saw the soldiers firing into the houses; and then the lancers would charge every now and then, the officers brandishing their swords at us,[1] till we cut round the corner for a bit, to come back as they went back. This was too close, though, and very foolish, for if any insurgent had been among us, and had fired upon the soldiers, we should all have been fired and ridden upon without mercy.

"To-day at first I thought matters worse: I could find no omnibus, and the shops by the barriers were shut up, the streets looking, and sounding, very melancholy and deserted. I met some wounded being carried to the hospital, too, which was a sickener. As I went on, however, I saw the proclamation, '*L'émeute est comprimée dans la Capitale*,' etc., and felt well pleased. The first house I called at, I found all the members of a family assembled in panic: several shots had come through their windows. I afterwards walked the whole Boulevard from the Madeleine nearly to the Bastille, except when stopped; and had the pleasure of seeing the barricades, and the damage

[1] A small group of curious spectators, eager to see as much as possible, of whom Stirling was one.

of the shot. An immense number of windows were pierced with bullets: many had hardly an inch of glass. The very Byron Tavern had two bullets in its front, which had been fired down from the Boulevard. On the Boulevard Poissonière there were two houses — a *magasin* of carpets, and another of shawls—riddled by bullets, and even *shattered into chasms by cannon balls.* Think of them taking cannons into the Trongate, and firing them at the opposite houses! ! ! !

"From the Boulevard I went and saw all the barricades and shot marks in the Rue Rambuteau, and by the Pointe St Eustache.

"There have been a great many deaths, etc.—*not* among the soldiers. I saw steps of doors beastly with blood. I have heard of a group of twenty *spectators* on the Boulevard—just on the other side of the troop of soldiers from where I was myself—being fired on, and only two escaping. Several English have been killed in that way. The best-known English chemist here [was] killed by a bullet through the thigh, which cut the great artery. He lies a corpse—was discovered almost accidentally—and his wife, poor woman, does not yet know it—as yet she is only told that he is wounded. So for the present this is the end—for the present—only for the present! I need not comment on what has led to this—your English papers will do that —but I feel a great deal very acutely. Thank God! Such things, on one side or the other, are quite impossible in England. I have left myself no room to notice the points in your last, but write me soon —and so I shall write you soon again. I have only room to say,—Your affectionate brother,

"JAMES."

Like the writer of this letter, when we read his description of the state of things in Paris, during

those three days of the famous *coup d'état*, we "feel a great deal very acutely." It affords much food for reflection. Such striking contrasts! The "beautiful forms and faces," that have come out again after the bad weather, "smiling and chatting, in a state of exhilaration," and jestingly trying the various barriers; and the troops charging handfuls of spectators; the houses of innocent citizens riddled with shot, and "even shattered into chasms by cannon balls"; the wounded being carried to hospitals; the door-steps "beastly with blood"! And all because one ambitious man desired to make himself ruler of France! Perhaps what is strangest of all is that he should have succeeded, and that the throne, set up, as it were, in the blood of innocent people, should have remained secure for nearly twenty years.

Probably few outsiders in Paris at the time saw as much, during those three days, as Stirling did, for fear no doubt kept most people within doors; and the accounts of what took place which reached the outer world through the Press, were most likely neither so truthful nor so circumstantial as that given above. The letter was preserved by Stirling's brother, and, on his death, some six years later, returned to the hands of its writer, by whom it was, in 1863, lent for perusal to the historian of the Crimean War.

Mr Kinglake, in a letter to Stirling, expressed deep interest in his account of "the day of blood," and regret that it had reached him too late for him to be able to make use of it in the fourth edition of his *History*.

After those three days, things settled down in Paris, and the citizens once more went about their work or their pleasure with their old zest. Stirling resumed his studies, and his attendance at lectures at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France. In some cases—perhaps in most—his attendance was

due, not to any interest in the subject of the lecture, but to his desire to accustom his ear to the language. He also took lessons in the pronunciation of French from M. Duquenois, a distinguished master of elocution, with the result that, as he wrote many years later in a letter to his friend, Dr Ingleby, "I have travelled a week in France as a Frenchman with only one detection, and the delighted '*J'y suis!*' of the detector was a sufficient compliment."

Many years afterwards, when Stirling had written his great work, and become a famous philosopher, a friend once remarked that the pronunciation of French was with him "a fine art." Some of his family can still recall their sufferings under his conscientious, if not too patient, instructions in the art—for he would never allow them to be taught French by anyone but himself. The tedium of those weary iterations and reiterations of vowels and diphthongs and gutturals—of *e* and *é* and *è* and *ê*; of *eu* and *u*; of *an* and *in* and *on* and *un*—under the keen, watchful eyes of the instructor, and the sense of your own hopeless stupidity with which you were somehow overwhelmed if you did not succeed in satisfying the sharp, listening ears with the exact *nuances*—are things not likely soon to be forgotten by those who experienced them.

After a year and a half spent in Paris, Stirling and his wife removed to St Servan, near St Malo, where they lived some three years and a half, and where two of their children were born. St Servan is now, one hears, a decayed little place, left high and dry by the tide of fashion, which yearly washes the coast at Dinard and Paramé and other places in the neighbourhood; but fifty-five years ago it seems to have been, in its way, quite a gay little town, with a resident population of some three hundred English, an English church and clergyman, and a club. The English residents were mostly younger branches of good families, who had settled

in the little town for reasons of economy; and they formed quite a pleasant little society, exchanging civilities in an unpretentious and inexpensive way.

In this little out-of-the-way French town, the lives of the future philosopher and his wife flowed on in a quiet, pleasant routine. They had rented a house, with a large garden, well stocked with fruit trees of all sorts; and the place being situated on the coast, Stirling was able to indulge his love of boating, and acquired a small sailing-boat, which he could manage without help. His mornings were given to study, his afternoons to his boat, his evenings usually, along with his wife, to the simple social intercourse of the place. Life in St Servan was so pleasant and happy that he grudged even the shortest break in it; and during a brief visit to his native country, in 1854, on business matters, we find him writing to his wife, after only a few days' absence from home, that he is "always earnestly longing to be in my only true nest again." In the same letter he bids her "take great care of yourself, for you are beyond all doubt the most valuable life of the whole of us. Live well, and take a grain of quinine three times a day."

It was in 1854 that the following letter from Carlyle was received—in acknowledgment, evidently, of the pamphlet on *Cholera*, mentioned in the previous chapter, which Stirling must have sent to him. In the letter there is an allusion to a meeting, of which no mention has been found elsewhere; but it is only natural to suppose that Stirling would seek a meeting with the author for whom he had such admiration and reverence, and that Carlyle would readily accord it to the writer of the *Letters* in *The Truth-Seeker*.

Letter from THOMAS CARLYLE.

"CHELSEA, LONDON,
18*th January* 1854.

"MY DEAR SIR,—I have read your little essay

on *Cholera;* and find it a very superior piece indeed. Lucid, ingenious, deep and true; everywhere intelligible, everywhere credible to me: it is by far the best account I ever got of that strange and haggard phenomenon; concerning which, indeed, a good deal of important nonsense has been uttered in this world, and 'common sense,' I fear, has been much of a rarity. Your little pamphlet abounds, moreover, in fine and good ideas that are not strictly of a technical nature at all; and everywhere there come reflexes and irradiations from a general system of thought, philosophical as well as medical, which I much approve of, and which greatly distinguish you on such an occasion. You will do well, as leisure may be offered you, or *possibility* may be offered, to elaborate those notices, and set them forth, in practical application, to the view of the medical and general public. Too widely circulated, too thoroughly believed, they cannot be, at present. The real Physician, I believe — were there but such an animal discoverable—is the real Moralist withal of these epochs. How often have I reflected on that bit of old Teutonic Etymology, that 'Healthy' is, in origin, identical with 'Holy.' *Gott der Heilige* (God the Holy) signifies precisely God the *Healthy* too—and ought ever so to signify, far as we have deviated, and sadly (into bottomless abominable quagmires and cloacas) since that true epoch! Do not neglect your word in season, if the opportunity is given you.

"I have been in many humours, and in many places, ideal and real, since the time I saw you here! You also appear to have had your changes: I wish you had spent a word or two in explaining to me what combination of winds and tides had drifted you into the harbour of St Malo, and what you are specially doing there. I could guess: some

body of English Industrials to whom an English Doctor had seemed necessary? Some years ago, I was one day at your old quarters, Merthyr Tydvil: a place never to be forgotten when once seen. The bleakest place *above* ground; I suppose, the *non-plus-ultra* of Industrialism, wholly mammonish, given up to shopkeeper supply-and-demand;—presided over by sooty Darkness, physical and spiritual, by Beer, Methodism, and the Devil, to a lamentable and supreme extent!—I have no more time, nor any more paper.—I remain always yours truly, T. CARLYLE."

If this letter is not to be compared with the letter of 1842, given above, either in literary expression or in the wisdom of its substance, it must be admitted to be thoroughly characteristic of its writer. It shows him, too, in a kindly and friendly aspect.

Besides the *Cholera* pamphlet, which was probably written there, the only literary work of Stirling's belonging to the St Servan period is his *Burns in Drama*, which was begun in 1855, but not completed till many years later. This piece is not to be taken as a drama in any technical sense, but, as the author says in his preface, is "merely intended as a study of character." It consists of a series of pictures of the events and circumstances which contributed to mould the character of the poet—the troubles of his early home, the types of people with whom he was surrounded, the ebullitions of his youthful passions and their consequences, his disgrace and despair, his brief period of glory in Edinburgh as the lion of the hour, and his last years of disappointment and bitterness. A well-known writer and critic,[1] writing to Stirling at the time of the publication of the piece, says: "*Burns in Drama* is, beyond question and opinion, masterly—

[1] George Cupples, author of the famous sea novel, *The Green Hand*.

a first-rate piece of work. It is thorough poetical representation—sets the man there—enters into him and all his surroundings. Wilson, to my mind, is better than Carlyle on the subject. But you do, I think, in far less space and few words, what he does with much oratory—and, besides that, you give what no one else has given, to *me* at all events: you reproduce and represent, and also give touches that are absolutely clairvoyant. In Burns's case these have a peculiar value, for to understand and appreciate him, personality is *first*, indispensable, essential."

Another critic about the same time writes: "You have restored to us the very personality of the man" (Burns).[1]

The desire to make himself familiar with German, led to the resolve, on Stirling's part, to stay for a while in Germany. Accordingly, in the summer of 1856, he and Mrs Stirling, accompanied by two young children and a French nurse, left St Servan, and set out for Heidelberg. In Heidelberg they rented a furnished *appartement*, which they occupied for a year—one of the happiest in their lives. They had few, if any, acquaintances in the little German town; but they were together, they were young and healthy, with little to trouble them; the weather was mostly good, the scenery was beautiful; and in the afternoons or early evenings, when Stirling had put aside his books, they would go on expeditions into the surrounding country — generally on foot — ending up with a simple meal in some quiet little inn at the limit of the excursion.

It was in Heidelberg that Stirling seems to have settled down to what was to be the real business of his life—the assimilation and interpretation of the

[1] Stirling's own opinion of the *Burns* is seen from a sentence in a letter to Mr Hale-White (author of *Mark Rutherford*), dated March 31, 1884: "The *Burns* is quite the BEST," he writes,—"*mature* too."

HEGEL.

(From photo by Bonn, Edin.)

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philosophy of Hegel—though nine years of laborious thought and study were yet to be gone through before the appearance of the fruit of his toil. Even before going to Germany he had, as was said above, been attracted to Hegel.

"As for Hegel, it was somewhat strange that, seeing the name—while still at home and without even a dream of Germany—with surprise, for the first time, in a Review, I was somehow very peculiarly impressed by it. But the special magic lay for me in this that, supping with two students of German before I was in German as deep as they, I heard this Hegel talked of with awe as, by universal repute, the deepest of all philosophers, but as equally also the darkest. The one had been asked to translate bits of him for the Press; and the other had come to the conclusion that there was something beyond usual remarkable in him: it was understood that he had not only completed philosophy; but, above all, reconciled to philosophy Christianity itself. *That struck*."

We see from this passage that what attracted Stirling to the study of Hegel was, partly, the reputed difficulty of the enterprise, and especially the fact that the German philosopher was supposed to overthrow the scepticism of the times, with its "thin negative," and restore to us our Christian faith by revealing the philosophical foundations on which it rests. As regards the difficulty of the subject, the remark of the distinguished philosophical writer and teacher, Professor Ferrier, seems to express the experience of most, if not all, who approached it previous to the publication of the *Secret*. "Who has ever yet," he is reported to have said, "uttered one intelligible word about Hegel? Not any of his countrymen—not any foreigner—seldom even himself. With peaks here and there more lucent than the sun, his intervals are filled with a sea of darkness, unnavigable by the aid of any compass, and an atmosphere in which no human intellect can breathe . . . Hegel is impenetrable, almost throughout, as a mountain."

Not very different were Stirling's own first impressions of Hegel, when, in Heidelberg, he opened the *Encyclopædia* for the first time :—

"The *Encyclopædia* proves utterly refractory, then. With resolute concentration we have set ourselves, again and again, to begin with the beginning, or, more desperately, with the end, perhaps with the middle—now with this section, now with that—in vain! Deliberate effort, desultory *dip*—'tis all the same thing! We shut the book; we look around for explanation and assistance. We are in Germany itself at the moment (say); and very naturally, in the first instance, we address ourselves to our own late teacher of the language. '*Other writers,*' he replies, '*may be this, may be that; but Hegel!—one has to stop! and think! and think!—Hegel! Ach, Gott!*' Such a weary look of exhausted effort lengthens the jaw! And it is our last chance of a word with our late teacher; for henceforth he always unaccountably vanishes at the very first glimpse of our person, though caught a mile off!"

Disappointed in his hopes of help from a fellow-countryman of Hegel's, Stirling turned to a fellow-countryman of his own—a man "of infinite ability," and "especially conversant with German"—with no better result. "With what a curious smile he looks up, and shakes his head, after having read the two or three first sentences of the first preface to the *Encyclopædia!*" It was not the words used in those two or three sentences which puzzled the reader. The words, as Stirling tells us, were "common and current"; but they were evidently used with "a meaning quite other than the ordinary one; *a meaning depending on some general system of thought, and intelligible consequently only to the initiated.*"

Books — the books of biographers and commentators to which Stirling now had recourse—served only to convince him that no help in grasping the system of Hegel was to be looked for from outsiders. If he was ever to reach the inner shrine of the Hegelian temple, he saw that it must be

with his own pick-axe, so to speak, that he must make his way through the walls of Hegelian granite. Second thoughts showed him that there was after all a *door* into the temple—if still, more or less, a *closed* door—and that door was Kant. If the Hegelian system "were to be understood at all, the only course that remained was to take it in its place as part and parcel of what is called *German philosophy* in general; and, with that object, to institute, necessarily, a systematic study of the entire subject from the commencement. Now that commencement was Kant."

It is here—in Heidelberg—that we seem to find the subject of this biography at the parting of the ways, with the necessity upon him of making his choice. He was still young—barely thirty-six, and perhaps, in some ways, younger than most men are at those years—he possessed what he regarded as a competence—what, living as he and his wife were doing, undoubtedly *was* a competence—and was under no obligation to exert himself to obtain his own or his family's daily bread. He had a capacity for enjoyment, a liking for cheerful society and out-of-door sports, such as boating; and he possessed a facile pen. With his wife and little children, his books, his boat, his friends and acquaintances, he might have led an easy, pleasant life, varied by desultory literary work. The alternative which offered itself was a life of what might be called concentrated intellectual drudgery, from which no visible fruits were to be expected for years, if at all. He had already had a taste of the kind of toil in which his days must be spent, if he elected to devote himself to the study of German philosophy; he knew how Hegel had baffled even his own countrymen, and how the translations of Kant into English were "most of them, to be regarded but as psychological curiosities." But he had already caught a glimpse of a truth on which, in later years, he was

never tired of insisting—that in order to do lasting work—work of solid value to humanity—at anyrate in philosophy, one must take the torch from the hand of a predecessor; one must not, as he puts it himself, "obey the impatience of vanity," but consent patiently to assimilate the "*Historic Pabulum*," and that he believed to be contained, as has already been said, in "the vessel of Hegel."

Writing some thirteen years later (in 1869) to Dr Ingleby,[1] with whom, from 1868 to 1883, he carried on a frequent correspondence, he says of Hegel that "he always proves his student's *fate*. After Hegel all else is so tame, insipid, colourless—so plainly mere verbiage! Then the difficulty of his dialectic remains to the most accomplished—and, while it is too clearly the last attempt at metaphysical explanation, the abler the mind of his student the more is this student beset with *aporias*—culs-de-sac—that are as much culs-de-sac as ever."

Hegel had, in fact, proved to be Stirling's fate. From his first acquaintance with Hegel, began that life which he describes in a letter to Mill, written several years later. "From 1856 to 1865," he writes, "I was most laboriously—rather with positive agony, indeed, and often for twelve hours a day—occupied with those German books that were not understood in England, and yet that, negatively or affirmatively, *required to be understood before an advance was possible for us*."

[1] Clement Mansfield Ingleby, LL.D., Cambridge, best known as an editor and commentator of Shakespeare, was also an excellent mathematician, and the author of one or two philosophical works.