

CHAPTER II

ECCLEFECHAN AND EDINBURGH

[1795-1826]

IN the introduction to one of his essays, Carlyle has warned us against giving too much weight to genealogy: but all his biographies, from the sketch of the Riquetti kindred to his full-length *Friedrich*, prefaced by two volumes of ancestry, recognise, if they do not overrate, inherited influences; and similarly his fragments of autobiography abound in suggestive reference. His family portraits are to be accepted with the deductions due to the family fever that was the earliest form of his hero-worship. Carlyle, says the *Athenæum* critic before quoted, divides contemporary mankind into the fools and the wise: the wise are the Carlyles, the Welshes, the Aitkens, and Edward Irving; the fools all the rest of unfortunate mortals: a Fuseli stroke of the critic¹ rivalling any of the author criticised; yet the comment has a grain of truth.

The Carlyles are said to have come from the English town somewhat differently spelt, to Annandale, with David II., and, according to a legend, which the great author did not disdain to accept, among them was a certain Lord of Torthorwald, so created for defences of the Border. The

¹ Even the most adverse critics of Carlyle are often his imitators, their hands taking a dye from what they work in.

churchyard of Ecclefechan is profusely strewn with the graves of the family, all with coats of arms—two griffins with adders' stings. More definitely we find Thomas, the author's grandfather, settled in that dullest of county villages as a carpenter. In 1745 he saw the rebel Highlanders on their southward march: he was notable for his study of *Anson's Voyages* and of the *Arabian Nights*: "a fiery man, his stroke as ready as his word; of the toughness and springiness of steel; an honest but not an industrious man"; subsequently tenant of a small farm, in which capacity he does not seem to have managed his affairs with much effect; the family were subjected to severe privations, the mother having, on occasion, to heat the meal into cakes by straw taken from the sacks on which the children slept. In such an atmosphere there grew and throve the five sons known as the five fighting masons—"a curious sample of folks," said an old apprentice of one of them, "pithy, bitter speaking bodies, and awfu' fighters." The second of the group, James, born 1757, married—first, a cousin, Janet Carlyle (the issue of which marriage, John of Cockermouth, died before his grandfather); second, Margaret Aitken, by whom he had four sons—THOMAS, 1795-1881; Alexander, 1797-1876; John (Dr. Carlyle, translator of Dante), 1801-1879; and James, 1805-1890; also five daughters, one of whom, Jane, became the wife of her cousin James Aitken of Dumfries, and the mother of Mary, the niece who tended her famous uncle so faithfully during the last years of his life. Nowhere is Carlyle's loyalty to his race shown in a fairer light than in the first of the papers published under the name of *Reminiscences*. It differs from the others in being of an early date and free from all offence. From this pathetic sketch, written when on a visit to London in 1832 he had sudden news of his father's death, we may, even in our brief space,

extract a few passages which throw light on the characters, *i.e.* the points of contact and contrast of the writer and his theme:—

In several respects I consider my father as one of the most interesting men I have known, . . . of perhaps the very largest natural endowment of any it has been my lot to converse with. None of you will ever forget that bold glowing style of his, flowing free from his untutored soul, full of metaphors (though he knew not what a metaphor was), with all manner of potent words. . . . Nothing did I ever hear him undertake to render visible which did not become almost ocularly so. Emphatic I have heard him beyond all men. In anger he had no need of oaths: his words were like sharp arrows that smote into the very heart. The fault was that he exaggerated (which tendency I also inherit), yet in description, and for the sake chiefly of humorous effect. He was a man of rigid, even scrupulous veracity. . . . He was never visited with doubt. The old Theorem of the Universe was sufficient for him . . . he stood a true man, while his son stands here on the verge of the new. . . . A virtue he had which I should learn to imitate: he never spoke of what was disagreeable and past. His was a healthy mind. He had the most open contempt for all "clatter." . . . He was irascible, choleric, and we all dreaded his wrath, but passion never mastered him. . . . Man's face he did not fear: God he always feared. His reverence was, I think, considerably mixed with fear—rather awe, as of unutterable depths of silence through which flickered a trembling hope. . . . Let me learn of him. Let me write my books as he built his houses, and walk as blamelessly through this shadow world. . . . Though genuine and coherent, living and life-giving, he was nevertheless but half developed. We had all to complain that we durst not freely love him. His heart seemed as if walled in: he had not the free means to unbosom himself. . . . It seemed as if an atmosphere of fear repelled us from him. To me it was especially so. Till late years I was ever more or less awed and chilled by him.

James Carlyle has been compared to the father of Burns. The failings of both leant to virtue's side, in different ways. They were at one in their integrity, independence, fighting

force at stress, and their command of winged words; but the elder had a softer heart, more love of letters, a broader spirit; the younger more power to stem adverse tides, he was a better man of business, made of tougher clay, and a grimmer Calvinist. "Mr. Lawson," he writes in 1817, "is doing very well, and has given us no more paraphrases." He seems to have grown more rigid as he aged, under the narrowing influences of the Covenanting land; but he remained stable and compact as the Auldgarth Bridge, built with his own hands. James Carlyle hammered on at Ecclefechan, making in his best year £100, till, after the first decade of the century, the family migrated to Mainhill, a bleak farm two miles from Lockerby, where he so thrived by work and thrift that he left, on his death in 1832, about £1000. Strong, rough, and eminently *straight*, intolerant of contradiction and ready with words like blows, his unsympathetic side recalls rather the father of the Brontës on the wild Yorkshire moor than William Burness by the ingle of Mount Oliphant. Margaret Carlyle was in theological theory as strict as her husband, and for a time made more moan over the aberrations of her favourite son. Like most Scotch mothers of her rank, she had set her heart on seeing him in a pulpit, from which any other eminence seemed a fall; but she became, though comparatively illiterate, having only late in life learnt to write a letter, a student of his books. Over these they talked, smoking together, in old country fashion, by the hearth; and she was to the last proud of the genius which grew in large measure under the unfailing sunshine of her anxious love.

Book II. of *Sartor* is an acknowledged fragment of autobiography, mainly a record of the author's inner life, but with numerous references to his environment. There is not much to identify the foster parents of Teufelsdröckh, and the dramatic drollery of the child's advent takes the

place of ancestry: Entefuhl is obviously Ecclefechan, where the ducks are paddling in the ditch that has to pass muster for a stream, to-day as a century gone: the severe frugality which (as in the case of Wordsworth and Carlyle himself) survived the need for it is clearly recalled; also the discipline of the Roman-like domestic law, "In an orderly house, where the litter of children's sports is hateful, your training is rather to bear than to do. I was forbid much, wishes in any measure bold I had to renounce; everywhere a strait bond of obedience inflexibly held me down. It was not a joyful life, yet . . . a wholesome one." The following oft-quoted passage is characteristic of his early love of nature and the humorous touches by which he was wont to relieve his fits of sentiment:—

On fine evenings I was wont to carry forth my supper (bread crumb boiled in milk) and eat it out of doors. On the coping of the wall, which I could reach by climbing, my porringer was placed: there many a sunset have I, looking at the distant mountains, consumed, not without relish, my evening meal. Those hues of gold and azure, that hush of worldly expectation as day died, were still a Hebrew speech for me: nevertheless I was looking at the fair illumined letters, and had an eye for the gilding.

In all that relates to the writer's own education, the *Dichtung* of *Sartor* and the *Wahrheit* of the *Reminiscences* are in accord. By Carlyle's own account, an "insignificant portion" of it "depended on schools." Like Burns, he was for some years trained in his own parish, where home influences counted for more than the teaching of not very competent masters. He soon read eagerly and variously. At the age of seven he was, by an Inspector of the old order, reported to be "complete in English." In his tenth year (1805) he was sent to the Grammar School of Annan, the "Hinterschlag Gymnasium," where

his "evil days began." Every oversensitive child finds the life of a public school one long misery. Ordinary boys—those of the Scotch borderland being of the most savage type—are more brutal than ordinary men; they hate singularity as the world at first hates originality, and have none of the restraints which the later semi-civilisation of life imposes. "They obey the impulse of rude Nature which bids the deer herd fall upon any stricken hart, the duck flock put to death any broken-winged brother or sister, and on all hands the strong tyrannise over the weak." Young Carlyle was mocked for his moody ways, laughed at for his love of solitude, and called "Tom the Tearful" because of his habit of crying. To add much to his discomfort, he had made a rash promise to his pious mother, who seems, in contrast to her husband's race, to have adopted non-resistance principles—a promise to abstain from fighting, provocative of many cuffs till it was well broken by a hinter-schlag, applied to some blustering bully. Nor had he refuge in the sympathy of his teachers, "hide-bound pedants, who knew Syntax enough, and of the human soul thus much: that it had a faculty called Memory, which could be acted on through the muscular integument by appliance of birch rods." At Annan, however, he acquired a fair knowledge of Latin and French, the rudiments of algebra, the Greek alphabet, began to study history, and had his first glimpse of Edward Irving, the bright prize-taker from Edinburgh, later his Mentor and then life-long friend. On Thomas's return home it was decided to send him to the University, despite the cynical warning of one of the village cronies, "Educate a boy, and he grows up to despise his ignorant parents." "Thou hast not done so," said old James in after years, "God be thanked for it," and the son pays due tribute to the tolerant patience and substantial generosity of the father: "With a noble faith he launched me forth into a

world which he himself had never been permitted to visit." Carlyle walked through Moffat all the way to Edinburgh with a senior student, Tom Smail (who owes to this fact the preservation of his name), with eyes open to every shade on the moors, as is attested in two passages of the *Reminiscences*. The boys, as is the fashion still, clubbed together in cheap lodgings, and Carlyle attended the curriculum from 1809 to 1814. Comparatively little is known of his college life, which seems to have been for the majority of Scotch students much as it is now, a compulsorily frugal life, with too little variety, relaxation, or society outside Class Rooms, and within them a constant tug at Science, mental or physical, at the gateway to dissecting souls or bodies. We infer, from hints in later conversations and memorials, that Carlyle lived much with his own fancies, and owed little to any system. He is clearly thinking of his own youth in his account of Dr. Francia: "Josè must have been a loose-made tawny creature, much given to taciturn reflection, probably to crying humours, with fits of vehement ill nature—subject to the terriblest fits of hypochondria." His explosion in *Sartor*, "It is my painful duty to say that out of England and Spain, ours was the worst of all hitherto discovered Universities," is the first of a long series of libels on things and persons he did not like. The Scotch capital was still a literary centre of some original brilliancy, in the light of the circle of Scott, which followed that of Burns, in the early fame of Cockburn and Clark (Lord Eldin), of the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh Reviews*, and of the elder Alison. The Chairs of the University were conspicuously well filled by men of the sedate sort of ability required from Professors, some of them—conspicuously Brown, the more original if less "sound" successor of Dugald Stewart, Playfair, and Leslie—rising to a higher rank. But great Educational institutions must adapt themselves to the

training of average minds by requirements and retractions against which genius always rebels. Biography more than History repeats itself, and the murmurs of Carlyle are, like those of Milton, Gibbon, Locke, and Wordsworth, the protests or growls of irrepressible individuality kicking against the pricks. He was never in any sense a classic; read Greek with difficulty—Æschylus and Sophocles mainly in translations—and while appreciating Tacitus disparaged Horace. For Scotch Metaphysics, or any logical system, he never cared, and in his days there was written over the Academic entrances "No Mysticism." He distinguished himself in Mathematics, and soon found, by his own vaunt,¹ the *Principia* of Newton prostrate at his feet: he was a favourite pupil of Leslie, who escaped the frequent penalty of befriending him, but he took no prizes: the noise in the class room hindered his answers, and he said later to Mr. Froude that thoughts only came to him properly when alone. The social leader of a select set of young men in his own rank, by choice and necessity *integer vitæ* he divided his time between the seclusion of study and writing letters, in which kind of literature he was perhaps the most prolific writer of his time. In 1814 Carlyle completed his course without taking a degree, did some tutorial work, and, in the same year, accepted the post of Mathematical Usher at Annan as successor to Irving, who had been translated to Haddington. Still in formal pursuit of the ministry, though beginning to fight shy of its fences, he went up twice a year to deliver addresses at the Divinity Hall, one of which, "on the uses of affliction," was afterwards by himself condemned as flowery; another was a Latin thesis on the theme, "num detur religio naturalis." The

¹ He went so far as to say in 1847 that "the man who had mastered the first forty-seven propositions of Euclid stood nearer to God than he had done before."

posthumous publication of some of his writings, *e.g.* of the fragment of the novel *Wotton Reinfred*, reconciles us to the loss of those which have not been recovered.

In the vacations, spent at Mainhill, he began to study German, and corresponded with his College friends. Many of Carlyle's early letters, reproduced in the volumes edited by Mr. Charles E. Norton, are written in what Sydney Smith asserts to be the only unpermissible style, "the tiresome"; and the thought, far from being precocious, is distinctly commonplace, *e.g.* the letter to Robert Mitchell on the fall of Napoleon; or the following to his parents: "There are few things in this world more valuable than knowledge, and youth is the season for acquiring it"; or to James Johnstone the trite quotation, "Truly pale death overturns with impartial foot the hut of the poor man and the palace of the king." Several are marred by the egotism which in most Scotch peasants of aspiring talent takes the form of perpetual comparison of themselves with others; refrains of the ambition against which the writer elsewhere inveighs as the "kettle tied to the dog's tail." In a note to Thomas Murray he writes:—

Ever since I have been able to form a wish, the wish of being known has been the foremost. Oh, Fortune! bestow coronets and crowns and principalities and purses, and pudding and power, upon the great and noble and fat ones of the earth. Grant me that, with a heart unyielding to thy favours and unbending to thy frowns, I may attain to literary fame.

That his critical and literary instincts were yet undeveloped there is ample proof. Take his comment, at the age of nineteen, on the verses of Leyden:—

Shout, Britons, for the battle of Assaye,
For that was a day
When we stood in our array
Like the lion's might at bay.

"Can anything be grander?" To Johnstone (who with Mitchell consumes a whole volume) he writes: "Read Shakespeare. If you have not, then I desire you read it (*sic*) and tell me what you think of *him*," etc. Elsewhere the dogmatic summary of Hume's "Essays" illustrates the lingering eighteenth-century Latinism that had been previously travestied in the more stilted passages of the letters of Burns. "Many of his opinions are not to be adopted. How odd does it look to refer all the modifications of national character to the influence of moral causes. Might it not be asserted with some plausibility that even those which he denominates moral causes originate from physical circumstances?" The whole first volume of this somewhat over-expanded collection overflows with ebullitions of bile, in comparison with which the misanthropy of Byron's early romances seems philanthropy, *e.g.*—

How weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world. For what are its inhabitants? Its great men and its little, its fat ones and its lean . . . pitiful automations, despicable Yahoos, yea, they are altogether an insufferable thing. "O for a lodge in some vast wilderness, some boundless contiguity of shade, where the scowl of the purse-proud nabob, the sneer and strut of the coxcomb, the bray of the ninny and the clodpole might never reach me more!"

On the other hand, there are frequent evidences of the imperial intrepidity, the matchless industry, and the splendid independence of the writer. In his twenty-first year Carlyle again succeeded his Annan predecessor (who seems to have given dissatisfaction by some vagaries of severity) as mathematical teacher in the main school of Kirkcaldy. The *Reminiscences* of Irving's generous reception of his protégé present one of the pleasantest pictures in the records of their friendship. The same chapter is illustrated by a series of sketches of the scenery of the

east coast rarely rivalled in descriptive literature. It is elsewhere enlivened, if also defaced, by the earliest examples of the cynical criticisms of character that make most readers rejoice in having escaped the author's observation.

During the two years of his residence in Fifeshire, Carlyle encountered his first romance, in making acquaintance with a well-born young lady, "by far the brightest and cleverest" of Irving's pupils—Margaret Gordon—"an acquaintance which might easily have been more" had not relatives and circumstances intervened. Doubtless Mr. Froude is right in asserting this lady to have been the original of *Sartor's* "Blumine," and in leaving him to marry "Herr Towgood," ultimately governor of Nova Scotia, she bequeathed, though in formal antitheses, advice that reflects well on her discrimination of character. "Cultivate the milder dispositions of the heart, subdue the mere extravagant visions of the brain. Genius will render you great. May virtue render you beloved. Remove the awful distance between you and other men by kind and gentle manners. Deal gently with their inferiority, and be convinced that they will respect you as much and like you more." To this advice, which he never even tried to take, she adds, happily perhaps for herself, "I give you not my address, because I dare not promise to see you." In 1818 Carlyle, always intolerant of work imposed, came to the conclusion that "it were better to perish than to continue schoolmastering," and left Kirkcaldy, with £90 saved, for Edinburgh, where he lived over three years, taking private pupils, and trying to enter on his real mission through the gates of literature,—gates constantly barred, for even in those older days of laxer competition, obstinacy, and outréness, unredeemed by any social advantages, were guarantees of frequent failure. Men with the literary form of genius highly developed have rarely much endurance of defeat.

Carlyle, even in his best moods, resented real or fancied injuries, and at this stage of his career complained that he got nothing but vinegar from his fellows, comparing himself to a worm that, trodden on, would turn into a torpedo. He had begun to be tormented by the dyspepsia, which "gnawed like a rat" at its life-long tenement, his stomach, and by sleeplessness, due in part to internal causes, but also to the "Bedlam" noises of men, machines, and animals, which pestered him in town and country from first to last. He kept hesitating about his career, tried law, mathematical teaching, contributions to magazines and dictionaries, everything but journalism, to which he had a rooted repugnance, and the Church, which he had definitely abandoned. How far the change in his views may have been due to his reading of Gibbon,¹ Rousseau, Voltaire, etc., how far to self-reflection is uncertain, but he already found himself unable, in a plain sense, to subscribe to the Westminster Confession or any so-called orthodox articles, and equally unable by any philosophical reconciliation of contraries to write black with white on a ground of neutral gray. Mentally and physically adrift he was midway in the valley of the shadow, which he represents as "The Everlasting No," and beset by "temptations in the wilderness." At this crisis he writes, "The biographies of men of letters are the wretchedest chapters in our history, except perhaps the Newgate Calendar," a remark that recalls the similar cry of Burns, "There are not among the martyrologies so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets." Carlyle, reverting to this crisis, refers with constant bitterness to the absence of a popularity which he yet professes to scorn.

¹ He refers to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* as "of all books the most impressive on me in my then stage of investigation and state of mind. His winged sarcasms, so quiet and yet so conclusively transpiercing, were often admirably potent and illustrative to me."

I was entirely unknown in Edinburgh circles ; solitary eating my own heart, misgivings as to whether there shall be presently anything else to eat, fast losing health, a prey to numerous struggles and miseries . . . three weeks without any kind of sleep, from impossibility to be free of noise, . . . wanderings through mazes of doubt, perpetual questions unanswered, etc.

What is this but Byron's cry, "I am not happy," which his afterwards stern critic compares to the screaming of a meat-jack ?

Carlyle carried with him from town to country the same dismal mood. "Mainhill," says his biographer, "was never a less happy home to him than it was this summer (1819). He could not conceal the condition of his mind ; and to his family, to whom the truth of their creed was no more a matter of doubt than the presence of the sun in the sky, he must have seemed as if possessed."

Returning to Edinburgh in the early winter, he for a time wrote hopefully about his studies. "The law I find to be a most complicated subject, yet I like it pretty well. Its great charm in my eyes is that no mean compliances are requisite for prospering in it." But this strain soon gave way to a fresh fit of perversity, and we have a record of his throwing up the cards in one of his most ill-natured notes.

I did read some law books, attend Hume's lectures on Scotch law, and converse with and question various dull people of the practical sort. But it and they and the admired lecturing Hume himself appeared to me mere denizens of the kingdom of dulness, pointing towards nothing but money as wages for all that bogpost of disgust.

The same year (that of Peterloo) was that of the Radical rising in Glasgow against the poverty which was the natural aftermath of the great war; oppressions, half real, half imaginary, of the military force, and the yeomanry in particular. Carlyle's contribution to the reminiscences of

the time is doubly interesting because written (in the article on Irving, 1836) from memory, when he had long ceased to be a Radical. A few sentences suffice to illustrate this phase or stage of his political progress :—

A time of great rages and absurd terrors and expectations, a very fierce Radical and anti-Radical time. Edinburgh, endlessly agitated by it all around me . . . gentry people full of zeal and foolish terror and fury, and looking *disgustingly busy and important*. . . . One bleared Sunday morning I had gone out for my walk. At the Riding-house in Nicolson Street was a kind of straggly group, with red-coats interspersed. They took their way, not very dangerous-looking men of war ; but there rose from the little crowd the strangest shout I have heard human throats utter, not very loud, but it said as plain as words, and with infinitely more emphasis of sincerity, "May the devil go with you, ye peculiarly contemptible, and dead to the distresses of your fellow-creatures !" Another morning . . . I met an advocate slightly of my acquaintance hurrying along, musket in hand, towards the Links, there to be drilled as item of the "gentlemen" volunteers now afoot. "You should have the like of this," said he, cheerily patting his musket. "Hm, yes ; but I haven't yet quite settled on which side"—which probably he hoped was quizz, though it really expressed my feeling . . . mutiny and revolt being a light matter to the young.

This period is illustrated by numerous letters from Irving, who had migrated to Glasgow as an assistant to Dr. Chalmers, abounding in sound counsels to persevere in some profession and make the best of practical opportunities. None of Carlyle's answers have been preserved, but the sole trace of his having been influenced by his friend's advice is his contribution (1820-1823) of sixteen¹

¹ The subjects of these were—Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Montfaucon, Dr. Moore, Sir John Moore, Necker, Nelson, Netherlands, Newfoundland, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Mungo Park, Lord Chatham, William Pitt. These articles, on the whole, judiciously omitted from the author's collected works, are characterised by marks of great industry, commonplace and general fairness, with a style singularly formal, like that of the less im-

articles to the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia* under the editorship of Sir David Brewster. The scant remuneration obtained from these was well timed, but they contain no original matter, and did nothing for his fame. Meanwhile it appears from one of Irving's letters that Carlyle's thoughts had been, as later in his early London life, turning towards emigration. "He says," writes his friend, "I have the ends of my thoughts to bring together . . . my views of life to reform, my health to recover, and then once more I shall venture my bark on the waters of this wide realm, and if she cannot weather it I shall steer west and try the waters of another world."

The resolves, sometimes the efforts of celebrated Englishmen, "nos manet oceanus," as Cromwell, Burns, Coleridge, and Southey (allured, some critic suggests, by the poetical sound of *Susquehanna*), Arthur Clough, Richard Hengist Horne, and Browning's "Waring,"¹ to elude

pressive pages of Johnson. The following, among numerous passages, are curious as illustrating the comparative orthodoxy of the writer's early judgments: "The brilliant hints which 'Montesquieu' scatters round him with a liberal hand have excited or assisted the speculations of others in almost every department of political economy, and he is deservedly mentioned as a principal founder of that important service." "Mirabeau confronted him ('Necker') like his evil genius; and being totally without scruple in the employment of any expedient, was but too successful in overthrowing all reasonable proposals, and conducting the people to that state of anarchy out of which his own ambition was to be rewarded," etc. Similarly the verdicts on Pitt, Chatham, Nelson, Park, Lady Montagu, etc., are those of an ordinary intelligent Englishman of conscientious research, fed on the "Lives of the Poets" and Trafalgar memories. The morality, as in the *Essay on Montaigne*, is unexceptionable; the following would commend itself to any boarding school: "Melancholy experience has never ceased to show that great warlike talents, like great talents of any kind, may be united with a coarse and ignoble heart."

¹ Cf. the American Byrant himself, in his longing to leave his New York Press and "plant him where the red deer feed, in the green forest," to lead the life of Robin Hood and Shakespeare's banished Duke.

“the fever and the fret” of an old civilisation, and take refuge in the fancied freedom of wild lands, when more than dreams have been failures. Puritan patriots, it is true, made New England and the scions of the Cavaliers Virginia; but no poet or imaginative writer has ever been successfully transplanted, with the dubious exception of Heinrich Heine. It is certain that, despite his first warm recognition coming from across the Atlantic, the author of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* would have found the “States” more fruitful in food for cursing than either Edinburgh or London.

The spring of 1820 was marked by a memorable visit to Irving, on Carlyle’s way to spend, as was his wont, the summer months at home. His few days in Glasgow are recorded in a graphic sketch of the bald-headed merchants at the Tontine, and an account of his introduction to Dr. Chalmers, to whom he refers always with admiration and a respect but slightly modified. The critic’s praise of British contemporaries, other than relatives, is so rare that the following sentences are worth transcribing:—

He (Chalmers) was a man of much natural dignity, ingenuity, honesty, and kind affection, as well as sound intellect and imagination. . . . He had a burst of genuine fun too. . . . His laugh was ever a hearty, low guffaw, and his tones in preaching would reach to the piercingly pathetic. No preacher ever went so into one’s heart. He was a man essentially of little culture, of narrow sphere all his life. Such an intellect, professing to be educated, and yet . . . ignorant in all that lies beyond the horizon in place or time I have almost nowhere met with—a man capable of so much soaking indolence, lazy brooding . . . as a first stage of his life well indicated, . . . yet capable of impetuous activity and braying audacity, as his later years showed. I suppose there will never again be such a preacher in any Christian church. “The truth of Christianity,” he said, “was all written in us already in sympathetic ink. Bible awakens it, and you can read.”

A sympathetic image but of no great weight as an argu-

ment addressed to doubting Thomas. Chalmers, whose originality lay rather in his quick insight and fire than in his, mainly commonplace, thought, had the credit of recognising the religious side of his (Carlyle's) genius, when to the mass of his countrymen he was a rock of offence. One of the great preacher's criticisms of the great writer is notably just: "He is a lover of earnestness more than a lover of truth."

There follows in some of the first pages of the *Reminiscences* an account of a long walk with Irving, who had arranged to accompany Carlyle for the first stage, *i.e.* fifteen miles of the road of his, for the most part, pedestrian march from Glasgow to Ecclefechan, a record among many of similar excursions over dales and hills, and "by the beached margent," revived for us in sun and shade by a pen almost as magical as Turner's brush. We must refer to the pages of Mr. Froude for the picture of Drumclog moss,—"a good place for Cameronian preaching, and dangerously difficult for Claverse (*sic*) and horse soldiery if the suffering remnant had a few old muskets among them,"—for the graphic glimpse of Ailsa Craig, and the talk by the dry stone fence, in the twilight. "It was just here, as the sun was sinking, Irving drew from me by degrees, in the softest manner, that I did not think as he of the Christian religion, and that it was vain for me to expect I ever could or should. This, if this was so, he had pre-engaged to take well of me, like an elder brother, if I would be frank with him. And right loyally he did so." They parted here: Carlyle trudged on to the then "utterly quiet little inn" at Muirkirk, left next morning at 4 A.M., and reached Dumfries, a distance of fifty-four miles, at 8 P.M., "the longest walk I ever made." He spent the summer at Mainhill, studying modern languages, "living riotously with Schiller and Goethe," at work on the *Encyclopædia*

articles, and visiting his friend at Annan, when there came an offer of the charge of a son of a Yorkshire farmer, which Irving urged him to accept, advancing the old plea, "You live too much in an ideal world," and wisely adding, "try your hand with the respectable illiterate men of middle life. You may be taught to forget . . . the splendours and envies . . . of men of literature."

This exhortation led to a result recorded with much humour, egotism, and arrogance in a letter to his intimate friend Dr. John Fergusson, of Kelso Grammar School, which, despite the mark "private and confidential," was yet published, several years after the death of the recipient and shortly after that of the writer, in a gossiping memoir. We are therefore at liberty to select from the letter the following paragraphs:—

I delayed sending an answer till I might have it in my power to communicate what seemed then likely to produce a considerable change in my stile (*sic*) of life, a proposal to become a "travelling tutor," as they call it, to a young person in the North Riding, for whom that exercise was recommended on account of bodily and mental weakness. They offered me £150 per annum, and withal invited me to come and examine things on the spot before engaging. I went accordingly, and happy was it I went; from description I was ready to accept the place; from inspection all Earndale would not have hired me to accept it. This boy was a dotard, a semi-vegetable, the elder brother, head of the family, a two-legged animal without feathers, intellect, or virtue, and all the connections seemed to have the power of eating pudding but no higher power. So I left the barbarous people. . . . York is but a heap of bricks. Jonathan Dryasdust (see *Ivanhoe*) is justly named. York is the Bœotia of Britain. . . . Upon the whole, however, I derived great amusement from my journey, . . . I conversed with all kinds of men, from graziers up to knights of the shire, argued with them all, and broke specimens from their souls (if any), which I retain within the museum of my cranium. I have no prospects that are worth the name. I am like a being thrown from another planet on this dark terrestrial ball, an alien, a

pilgrim . . . and life is to me like a pathless, a waste, and a howling wilderness. Do not leave your situation if you can possibly avoid it. Experience shows it to be a fearful thing to be swept in by the roaring surge of life, and then to float alone undirected on its restless, monstrous bosom. Keep ashore while yet you may, or if you must to sea, sail under convoy ; trust not the waves without a guide. You and I are but pinnaces or cock-boats, yet hold fast by the Manilla ship, *and do not let go the painter.*

Towards the close of this year Irving, alarmed by his friend's despondency, sent him a most generous and delicately-worded invitation to spend some months under his roof ; but Carlyle declined, and in a letter of March 1821 he writes to his brother John : "Edinburgh, with all its drawbacks, is the only scene for me," on which follows one of his finest descriptions, that of the view from Arthur Seat.

According to the most probable chronology, for many of Carlyle's dates are hard to fix, the next important event of his life, his being introduced, on occasion of a visit to Haddington, to Miss Jane Welsh by her old tutor, Edward Irving—an event which marks the beginning of a new era in his career—took place towards the close of May or in the first week of June. To June is assigned the incident, described in *Sartor* as the transition from the Everlasting No to the Everlasting Yea, a sort of revelation that came upon him as he was in Leith Walk—Rue St. Thomas de l'Enfer in the Romance—on the way to cool his distempers by a plunge in the sea. The passage proclaiming this has been everywhere quoted ; and it is only essential to note that it resembled the "illuminations" of St. Paul and of Constantine merely by its being a sudden spiritual impulse. It was in no sense a conversion to any belief in person or creed, it was but the assertion of a strong manhood against an almost suicidal mood of despair ;

a condition set forth with a superabundant paraphernalia of eloquence easily condensed. Doubt in the mind of Teufelsdröckh had darkened into disbelief in divine or human justice, freedom, or himself. If there be a God, He sits on the hills "since the first Sabbath," careless of mankind. Duty seems to be but a "phantasm made up of desire and fear"; virtue "some bubble of the blood," absence of vitality perhaps.

What in these days are terrors of conscience to diseases of the liver? Not on morality but on cookery let us build our stronghold. . . . Thus has the bewildered wanderer to stand, shouting question after question into the Sibyl cave, and receiving for answer an echo.

From this scepticism, deeper than that of *Queen Mab*, fiercer than that of *Candide*, Carlyle was dramatically rescued by the sense that he was a servant of God, even when doubting His existence.

After all the nameless woe that inquiry had wrought me, I nevertheless still loved truth, and would bate no jot of my allegiance. . . . Truth I cried, though the heavens crush me for following her; no falsehood! though a whole celestial lubberland were the price of apostacy.

With a grasp on this rock, Carlyle springs from the slough of despond and asserts himself:—

Ich bin ein Mensch geboren
Und das muss ein Kämpfer seyn.

He finds in persistent action, energy, and courage a present strength, and a lamp of at least such partial victory as he lived to achieve.

He would not make his judgment blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind,—

but he never "laid them," or came near the serenity of his master, Goethe; and his teaching, public and private, remained half a wail. The Leith Walk revolt was rather

the attitude of a man turning at bay than of one making a leap.

Death? Well, Death . . . let it come then, and I will meet it and defy it. And as so I thought there rushed a stream of fire over my soul, and I shook base fear away. Ever from that time the temper of my misery was changed; not . . . whining sorrow . . . but grim defiance.

Yet the misery remained, for two years later we find him writing:—

I could read the curse of Ernulphus, or something twenty times as fierce, upon myself and all things earthly. . . . The year is closing. This time eight and twenty years I was a child of three weeks ago. . . .

Oh! little did my mother think,
That day she cradled me,
The lands that I should travel in,
The death I was to dee.

My curse seems deeper and blacker than that of any man: to be immured in a rotten carcase, every avenue of which is changed into an inlet of pain. How have I deserved this? . . . I know not. Then why don't you kill yourself, sir? Is there not arsenic? is there not ratsbane of various kinds? and hemp, and steel? Most true, Sathanas . . . but it will be time enough to use them when I have *lost* the game I am but *losing*, . . . and while my friends, my mother, father, brothers, sisters live, the duty of not breaking their hearts would still remain. . . . I want health, health, health! On this subject I am becoming quite furious: my torments are greater than I am able to bear.

Nowhere in Carlyle's writing, save on the surface, is there any excess of Optimism; but after the Leith Walk inspiration he had resolved on "no surrender"; and that, henceforth, he had better heart in his work we have proof in its more regular, if not more rapid progress. His last hack service was the series of articles for Brewster, unless we add a translation, under the same auspices, of Legendre's

Geometry, begun, according to some reports, in the Kirkcaldy period, finished in 1822, and published in 1824. For this task, prefixed by an original *Essay on Proportion*, much commended by De Morgan, he obtained the respectable sum of £50. Two subsequent candidatures for Chairs of Astronomy showed that Carlyle had not lost his taste for Mathematics; but this work was his practical farewell to that science. His first sustained efforts as an author were those of an interpreter. His complete mastery of German has been said to have endowed him with "his sword of sharpness and shoes of swiftness"; it may be added, in some instances also, with the "fog-cap." But in his earliest substantial volume, the *Life of Schiller*, there is nothing either obscure in style or mystic in thought. This work began to appear in the *London Magazine* in 1823, was finished in 1824, and in 1825 published in a separate form. Approved during its progress by an encouraging article in the *Times*, it was, in 1830, translated into German on the instigation of Goethe, who introduced the work by an important commendatory preface, and so first brought the author's name conspicuously before a continental public. Carlyle himself, partly, perhaps, from the spirit of contradiction, was inclined to speak slightly of this high-toned and sympathetic biography: "It is," said he, "in the wrong vein, laborious, partly affected, meagre bombastic." But these are sentences of a morbid time, when, for want of other victims, he turned and rent himself. *Pari passu*, he was toiling at his translation of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. This was published in Edinburgh in 1824. Heartily commended in *Blackwood*, it was generally recognised as one of the best English renderings of any foreign author; and Jeffrey, in his absurd review of Goethe's great prose drama, speaks in high terms of the skill displayed by the translator. The virulent attack of De Quincey—a writer as

unreliable as brilliant—in the *London Magazine* does not seem to have carried much weight even then, and has none now. The *Wanderjahre*, constituting the third volume of the English edition, first appeared as the last of four on German Romance—a series of admirably selected and executed translations from Musæus, Fouqué, Tieck, Hoffmann, Richter, and Goethe, prefaced by short biographical and critical notices of each—published in Edinburgh in 1827. This date is also that of the first of the more elaborate and extensive criticisms which, appearing in the Edinburgh and Foreign reviews, established Carlyle as the English pioneer of German literature. The result of these works would have been enough to drive the wolf from the door and to render their author independent of the oatmeal from home; but another source of revenue enabled him not only to keep himself, but to settle his brother Alick in a farm, and to support John through his University course as a medical student. This and similar services to the family circle were rendered with gracious disclaimers of obligation. “What any brethren of our father’s house possess, I look on as a common stock from which all are entitled to draw.”

For this good fortune he was again indebted to his friend of friends. Irving had begun to feel his position at Glasgow unsatisfactory, and at the close of 1821 he was induced to accept an appointment to the Caledonian Chapel at Hatton Garden. On migrating to London, to make a greater, if not a safer, name in the central city, and finally, be lost in its vortex, he had invited Carlyle to follow him, saying, “Scotland breeds men, but England rears them.” Shortly after, introduced by Mrs. Strachey, one of his worshipping audience, to her sister Mrs. Buller, he found the latter in trouble about the education of her sons. Charles, the elder, was a youth of

bright but restive intelligence, and it was desired to find some transitional training for him on his way from Harrow to Cambridge. Irving urged his being placed, in the interim, under Carlyle's charge. The proposal, with an offer of £200 a year, was accepted, and the brothers were soon duly installed in George Square, while their tutor remained in Moray Place, Edinburgh. The early stages of this relationship were eminently satisfactory; Carlyle wrote that the teaching of the Bullers was a pleasure rather than a task; they seemed to him "quite another set of boys than I have been used to, and treat me in another sort of manner than tutors are used. The eldest is one of the cleverest boys I have ever seen." There was never any jar between the teacher and the taught. Carlyle speaks with unflinching regard of the favourite pupil, whose brilliant University and Parliamentary career bore testimony to the good practical guidance he had received. His premature death at the entrance on a sphere¹ of wider influence made a serious blank in his old master's life.

But as regards the relation of the employer and employed, we are wearied by the constantly recurring record of kindness lavishly bestowed, ungraciously received, and soon ungratefully forgotten. The elder Bullers—the mother a former beauty and woman of some brilliancy, the father a solid and courteous gentleman retired from the Anglo-Indian service—came to Edinburgh in the spring of the tutorship, and recognising Carlyle's abilities, welcomed him to the family circle, and treated him, by his own confession, with a "degree of respect" he "did not deserve"; adapting their arrangements, as far as possible, to his hours and habits; consulting his convenience and humouring his whims. Early in 1823 they went to live together at Kinnaird

¹ Charles Buller became Carlyle's pupil at the age of fifteen. He died as Commissioner of the Poor in 1848 (*æt.* forty-two).

House, near Dunkeld, when he continued to write letters to his kin still praising his patrons; but the first note of discord is soon struck in satirical references to their aristocratic friends and querulous complaints of the servants. During the winter, for greater quiet, a room was assigned to him in another house near Kinnaird; a consideration which met with the award: "My bower is the most polite of bowers, refusing admittance to no wind that blows." And about this same time he wrote, growling at his fare: "It is clear to me that I shall never recover my health under the economy of Mrs. Buller."

In 1824 the family returned to London, and Carlyle followed in June by a sailing yacht from Leith. On arrival he sent to Miss Welsh a letter, sneering at his fellow passengers, but ending with a striking picture of his first impressions of the capital:—

We were winding slowly through the forest of masts in the Thames up to our station at Tower Wharf. The giant bustle, the coal heavers, the bargemen, the black buildings, the ten thousand times ten thousand sounds and movements of that monstrous harbour formed the grandest object I had ever witnessed. One man seems a drop in the ocean; you feel annihilated in the immensity of that heart of all the world.

On reaching London he first stayed for two or three weeks under Irving's roof and was introduced to his friends. Of Mrs. Strachey and her young cousin Kitty, who seems to have run the risk of admiring him to excess, he always spoke well: but the Basil Montagues, to whose hospitality and friendship he was made welcome, he has maligned in such a manner as to justify the retaliatory pamphlet of the sharp-tongued eldest daughter of the house, then about to become Mrs. Anne Procter. By letter and "reminiscence" he is equally reckless in invective against almost all the eminent men of letters with whom he

then came in contact, and also, in most cases, in ridicule of their wives. His accounts of Hazlitt, Campbell, and Coleridge have just enough truth to exasperate the libels, in some cases perhaps whetted by the consciousness of their being addressed to a sympathetic listener: but it is his frequent travesty of well-wishers and creditors for kindness that has left the deepest stain on his memory. Settled with his pupil Charles in Kew Green lodgings he writes: "The Bullers are essentially a cold race of people. They live in the midst of fashion and external show. They love no living creature." And a fortnight later, from Irving's house at Pentonville, he sends to his mother an account of his self-dismissal. Mrs. Buller had offered him two alternatives—to go with the family to France or to remain in the country preparing the eldest boy for Cambridge. He declined both, and they parted, shaking hands with dry eyes. "I feel glad," he adds in a sentence that recalls the worst egotism of Coleridge,¹ "that I have done with them . . . I was selling the very quintessence of my spirit for £200 a year."

There followed eight weeks of residence in or about Birmingham, with a friend called Badams, who undertook to cure dyspepsia by a new method and failed without being reviled. Together, and in company with others, as the astronomer Airy, they saw the black country and the toiling squads, in whom Carlyle, through all his shifts from radical democracy to Platonic autocracy, continued to take a deep interest; on other days they had pleasant excursions to the green fields and old towers of Warwickshire. On occasion of this visit he came in contact with De Quincey's review of *Meister*, and in recounting the event credits himself with the philosophic thought, "This man is perhaps right on some points; if so let him be admonitory."

¹ *Vide* Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*, chap. viii. p. 79

But the description that follows of "the child that has been in hell," however just, is less magnanimous. Then came a trip, in company with Mr. Strachey and Kitty and maid, by Dover and Calais along Sterne's route to Paris, "The Vanity Fair of the Universe," where Louis XVIII. was then lying dead in state. Carlyle's comments are mainly acid remarks on the Palais Royal, with the refrain, "God bless the narrow seas." But he saw Legendre and Laplace, heard Cuvier lecture and Talma act, and, what was of more moment, had his first sight of the Continent and the city of one phase of whose history he was to be the most brilliant recorder. Back in London for the winter, where his time was divided between Irving's house and his own neighbouring room in Southampton Street; he was cheered by Goethe's own acknowledgment of the translation of *Meister*, and wrote more epistolary satires, welcome at Haddington.

In March 1825 Carlyle again set his face northward, and travelling by coach through Birmingham, Manchester, Bolton, and Carlisle, established himself, in May, at Hoddam Hill; a farm near the Solway, three miles from Mainhill, which his father had leased for him. His brother Alexander farmed, while Thomas toiled on at German translations and rode about on horseback. For a space, one of the few contented periods of his life, there is a truce to complaining. Here free from the noises, which are the pests of literary life, he was building up his character and forming the opinions which, with few material changes, he long continued to hold. Thus he writes from over a distance of forty years:—

With all its manifold petty troubles, this year at Hoddam Hill has a rustic beauty and dignity to me, and lies now like a not ignoble russet-coated idyll in my memory; one of the quietest on the whole, and perhaps the most triumphantly important of my life. . . . I found that I had conquered all my scepti-

cisms, agonising doubtings, fearful wrestlings with the foul and vile and soul-murdering mud-gods of my epoch, and was emerging free in spirit into the eternal blue of ether. I had in effect gained an immense victory. . . . Once more, thank Heaven for its highest gift, I then felt and still feel endlessly indebted to Goethe in the business. He, in his fashion, I perceived, had travelled the steep road before me, the first of the moderns. Bodily health itself seemed improving. . . . Nowhere can I recollect of myself such pious musings, communings silent and spontaneous with Fact and Nature as in these poor Annandale localities. The sound of the Kirk bell once or twice on Sunday mornings from Hoddam Kirk, about a mile off on the plain below me, was strangely touching, like the departing voice of eighteen hundred years.

Elsewhere, during one of the rare gleams of sunshine in a life of lurid storms, we have the expression of his passionate independence, his tyrannous love of liberty:—

It is inexpressible what an increase of happiness and of consciousness—of inward dignity—I have gained since I came within the walls of this poor cottage—my own four walls. They simply admit that I am *Herr im Hause*, and act on this conviction. There is no grumbling about my habitudes and whims. If I choose to dine on fire and brimstone, they will cook it for me to their best skill, thinking only that I am an unintelligible mortal, *fâcheux* to deal with, but not to be dealt with in any other way. My own four walls.

The last words form the refrain of a set of verses, the most characteristic, as Mr. Froude justly observes, of the writer, the actual composition of which seems, however, to belong to the next chapter of his career, beginning—

The storm and night is on the waste,
Wild through the wind the huntsman calls,
As fast on willing nag I haste
Home to my own four walls.

The feeling that inspires them is clenched in the defiance—

King George has palaces of pride,
And armed grooms must ward those halls ;
With one stout bolt I safe abide
Within my own four walls.

Not all his men may sever this ;
It yields to friends', not monarchs' calls ;
My whinstone house my castle is—
I have my own four walls.

When fools or knaves do make a rout,
With jigmen, dinners, balls, cabals,
I turn my back and shut them out :
These are my own four walls.