

CHAPTER VII

DECADENCE

[1866-1881]

AFTER this shock of bereavement Carlyle's days went by "on broken wing," never brightening, slowly saddening to the close ; but lit up at intervals by flashes of the indomitable energy that, starting from no vantage, had conquered a world of thought, and established in it, if not a new dynasty, at least an intellectual throne. Expressions of sympathy came to him from all directions, from the Queen herself downwards, and he received them with the grateful acknowledgment that he had, after all, been loved by his contemporaries. When the question arose as to his future life, it seemed a natural arrangement that he and his brother John, then a childless widower who had retired from his profession with a competence, should take up house together. The experiment was made, but, to the discredit of neither, it proved a failure. They were in some respects too much alike. John would not surrender himself wholly to the will or whims even of one whom he revered, and the attempt was, by mutual consent, abandoned ; but their affectionate correspondence lasted through the period of their joint lives. Carlyle, being left to himself in his "gaunt and lonesome home," after a short visit to Miss

Bromley, an intimate friend of his wife, at her residence in Kent, accepted the invitation of the second Lady Ashburton to spend the winter in her house at Mentone. There he arrived on Christmas Eve 1866, under the kind convoy of Professor Tyndall, and remained breathing the balmy air and gazing on the violet sea till March of the following year. During the interval he occupied himself in writing his *Reminiscences*, drawing pen-and-ink pictures of the country, steeped in beauty fit to soothe any sorrow save such as his, and taking notes of some of the passers-by. Of the greatest celebrity then encountered, Mr. Gladstone, he writes in his journal, in a tone intensified as time went on: "Talk copious, ingenious, . . . a man of ardent faculty, but all gone irrecoverably into House of Commons shape. . . . Man once of some wisdom or possibility of it, but now possessed by the Prince, or many Princes, of the Air." Back in Chelsea, he was harassed by heaps of letters, most of which, we are told, he answered, and spent a large portion of his time and means in charities.

Amid Carlyle's irreconcilable inconsistencies of theory, and sometimes of conduct, he was through life consistent in practical benevolence. The interest in the welfare of the working classes that in part inspired his *Sartor*, *Chartism*, and *Past and Present* never failed him. He was among the foremost in all national movements to relieve and solace their estate. He was, further, with an amiable disregard of his own maxims, overlenient towards the waifs and strays of humanity, in some instances careless to inquire too closely into the causes of their misfortune or the degree of their demerits. In his latter days this disposition grew upon him: the gray of his own evening skies made him fuller of compassion to all who lived in the shade. Sad himself, he mourned with those who mourned; afflicted, he held out hands to all in affliction. Consequently "the poor

were always with him," writing, entreating, and personally soliciting all sorts of alms, from advice and help to ready money. His biographer informs us that he rarely gave an absolute refusal to any of these various classes of beggars. He answered a letter which is a manifest parody of his own surface misanthropy; he gave a guinea to a ticket-of-leave-man, pretending to be a decayed tradesman; and a shilling to a street sweeper, who at once took it over his crossing to a gin shop. Froude remonstrated; "Poor fellow," was the answer, "I daresay he is cold and thirsty." The memory of Wordsworth is less warmly cherished among the dales of Westmoreland than that of Carlyle in the lanes of Chelsea, where "his one expensive luxury was charity."

His attitude on political questions, in which for ten years he still took a more or less prominent part, represents him on his sterner side. The first of these was the controversy about Governor Eyre, who, having suppressed the Jamaica rebellion by the violent and, as alleged, cruel use of martial law, and hung a quadroon preacher called Gordon—the man whether honest or not being an undoubted incendiary—without any law at all, was by the force of popular indignation dismissed in disgrace, and then arraigned for misgovernment and illegality. In the movement, which resulted in the governor's recall and impeachment, there was doubtless the usual amount of exaggeration—represented by the violent language of one of Carlyle's minor biographers: "There were more innocent people slain than at Jeffrey's Bloody Assize"; "The massacre of Glencoe was nothing to it"; "Members of Christian Churches were flogged," etc. etc.—but among its leaders there were so many men of mark and celebrity, men like John S. Mill, T. Hughes, John Bright, Fawcett, Cairnes, Goldwin Smith, Herbert Spencer, and Frederick Harrison, that it could not be set aside as a mere unreasoning clamour. It was a hard

test of Carlyle's theory of strong government; and he stood to his colours. Years before, on John Sterling suggesting that the negroes themselves should be consulted as to making a permanent engagement with their masters, he had said, "I never thought the rights of the negroes worth much discussing in any form. Quashee will get himself made a slave again, and with beneficent whip will be compelled to work." On this occasion he regarded the black rebellion in the same light as the Sepoy revolt. He organised and took the chair of a "Defence Committee," joined or backed by Ruskin, Henry Kingsley, Tyndall, Sir R. Murchison, Sir T. Gladstone, and others. "I never," says Mr. Froude, "knew Carlyle more anxious about anything." He drew up a petition to Government and exerted himself heart and soul for the "brave, gentle, chivalrous, and clear man," who when the ship was on fire "had been called to account for having flung a bucket or two of water into the hold beyond what was necessary." He had damaged some of the cargo perhaps, but he had saved the ship, and deserved to be made "dictator of Jamaica for the next twenty-five years," to govern after the model of Dr. Francia in Paraguay. The committee failed to get Eyre reinstated or his pension restored; but the impeachment was unsuccessful.

The next great event was the passing of the Reform Bill of 1867, by the Tories, educated by Mr. Disraeli to this method of "dishing the Whigs," by outbidding them in the scramble for votes. This instigated the famous tract called *Shooting Niagara*, written in the spirit of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*—Carlyle's final and unqualified denunciation of this concession to Democracy and all its works. But the upper classes in England seemed indifferent to the warning. "Niagara, or what you like," the author quotes as the saying of a certain shining countess, "we

will at least have a villa on the Mediterranean when Church and State have gone." A *mot* emphatically of the decadence.

Later he fulminated against the Clerkenwell explosions being a means of bringing the Irish question within the range of practical politics.

I sit in speechless admiration of our English treatment of those Fenians first and last. It is as if the rats of a house had decided to expel and extirpate the human inhabitants, which latter seemed to have neither rat-catchers, traps, nor arsenic, and are trying to prevail by the method of love.

Governor Eyre, with Spenser's Essay on Ireland and Cromwell's storm of Drogheda for his texts, or Otto von Bismarck, would have been, in his view, in place at Dublin Castle.

In the next great event of the century, the close of the greatest European struggle since Waterloo, the cause which pleased Cato pleased also the gods. Carlyle, especially in his later days, had a deepening confidence in the Teutonic, a growing distrust of the Gallic race. He regarded the contest between them as one between Ormuzd and Ahriman, and wrote of Sedan, as he had written of Rossbach, with exultation. When a feeling began in this country, naming itself sympathy for the fallen,—really half that, the other half, as in the American war, being jealousy of the victor,—and threatened to be dangerous, Carlyle wrote a decisive letter to the *Times*, November 11th 1870, tracing the sources of the war back to the robberies of Louis XIV., and ridiculing the prevailing sentiment about the recaptured provinces of Lothringen and Elsass. With a possible reference to Victor Hugo and his clients, he remarks—

They believe that they are the "Christ of Nations." . . . I wish they would inquire whether there might not be a Cartouche of nations. Cartouche had many gallant qualities—had many

fine ladies begging locks of his hair while the indispensable gibbet was preparing. Better he should obey the heavy-handed Teutsch police officer, who has him by the windpipe in such frightful manner, give up part of his stolen goods, altogether cease to be a Cartouche, and try to become again a Chevalier Bayard. All Europe does *not* come to the rescue in gratitude for the heavenly illumination it is getting from France: nor could all Europe if it did prevent that awful Chancellor from having his own way. Metz and the boundary fence, I reckon, will be dreadfully hard to get out of that Chancellor's hands again. . . . Considerable misconception as to Herr von Bismarck is still prevalent in England. He, as I read him, is not a person of Napoleonic ideas, but of ideas quite superior to Napoleonic. . . . That noble, patient, deep, pious, and solid Germany should be at length welded into a nation, and become Queen of the Continent, instead of vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless, and over-sensitive France, seems to me the hopefulest fact that has occurred in my time.

Carlyle seldom wrote with more force, or with more justice. Only, to be complete, his paper should have ended with a warning. He has done more than any other writer to perpetuate in England the memories of the great thinkers and actors—Fichte, Richter, Arndt, Körner, Stein, Goethe, —who taught their countrymen how to endure defeat and retrieve adversity. Who will celebrate their yet undefined successors, who will train Germany gracefully to bear the burden of prosperity? Two years later Carlyle wrote or rather dictated, for his hand was beginning to shake, his historical sketch of the *Early Kings of Norway*, showing no diminution of power either of thought or expression, his estimates of the three Hakons and of the three Olafs being especially notable; and a paper on *The Portraits of John Knox*, the prevailing dull gray of which is relieved by a radiant vision of Mary Stuart.

He was incited to another public protest, when, in May 1877, towards the close of the Russo-Turkish war, he had got, or imagined himself to have got, reliable information

that Lord Beaconsfield, then Prime Minister, having sent our fleet to the Dardanelles, was planning to seize Gallipoli and throw England into the struggle. Carlyle never seems to have contemplated the possibility of a Sclavo-Gallic alliance against the forces of civilised order in Europe, and he chose to think of the Czars as the representatives of an enlightened autocracy. We are here mainly interested in the letter he wrote to the *Times*, as "his last public act in this world,"—the phrase of Mr. Froude, who does not give the letter, and unaccountably says it "was brief, not more than three or four lines." It is as follows:—

SIR—A rumour everywhere prevails that our miraculous Premier, in spite of the Queen's Proclamation of Neutrality, intends, under cover of care for "British interests," to send the English fleet to the Baltic, or do some other feat which shall compel Russia to declare war against England. Latterly the rumour has shifted from the Baltic and become still more sinister, on the eastern side of the scene, where a feat is contemplated that will force, not Russia only, but all Europe, to declare war against us. This latter I have come to know as an indisputable fact; in our present affairs and outlooks surely a grave one.

As to "British interests" there is none visible or conceivable to me, except taking strict charge of our route to India by Suez and Egypt, and for the rest, resolutely steering altogether clear of any copartnery with the Turk in regard to this or any other "British interest" whatever. It should be felt by England as a real ignominy to be connected with such a Turk at all. Nay, if we still had, as we ought to have, a wish to save him from perdition and annihilation in God's world, the one future for him that has any hope in it is even now that of being conquered by the Russians, and gradually schooled and drilled into peaceable attempt at learning to be himself governed. The newspaper outcry against Russia is no more respectable to me than the howling of Bedlam, proceeding as it does from the deepest ignorance, egoism, and paltry national jealousy.

These things I write, not on hearsay, but on accurate knowledge, and to all friends of their country will recommend immediate attention to them while there is yet time, lest in a

few weeks the maddest and most criminal thing that a British government could do, should be done and all Europe kindle into flames of war.—I am, etc.

T. CARLYLE.

5 CHEYNE ROW, CHELSEA,
May 4th.

Meanwhile honours without stint were being rendered to the great author and venerable sage. In 1868 he had by request a personal interview with the Queen, and has left, in a letter, a graphic account of the interview at the Deanery of Westminster. Great artists as Millais, Watts, and Boehme vied with each other, in painting or sculpture, to preserve his lineaments; prominent reviews to record their impression of his work, and disciples to show their gratitude. One of these, Professor Masson of Edinburgh, in memory of Carlyle's own tribute to Goethe, started a subscription for a medal, presented on his eightieth birthday; but he valued more a communication of the same date from Prince Bismarck. Count Bernstoff from Berlin wrote him (1871) a semi-official letter of thanks for the services he had conferred on Germany, and in 1874 he was prevailed on to accept the Prussian "Ordre pour le mérite." In the same year Mr. Disraeli proposed, in courteous oblivion of bygone hostilities, to confer on him a pension and the "Order of the Grand Cross of Bath," an emolument and distinction which Carlyle, with equal courtesy, declined. To the Countess of Derby, whom he believed to be the originator of the scheme, he (December 30th) expressed his sense of the generosity of the Premier's letter: "It reveals to me, after all the hard things I have said of him, a new and unexpected stratum of genial dignity and manliness of character." To his brother John he wrote: "I do, however, truly admire the magnanimity of Dizzy in regard to me. He is the only man I almost never spoke of without contempt . . . and yet see here he comes with a pan of

hot coals for my guilty head." That he was by no means gagged by personal feeling or seduced in matters of policy is evident from the above-quoted letter to the *Times*; but he liked Disraeli better than his great rival; the one may have bewildered his followers, the other, according to his critic's view, deceived himself—the lie, in Platonic phrase, had got into the soul, till, to borrow an epigram, "he made his conscience not his guide but his accomplice." "Carlyle," says Mr. Froude, "did not regard Mr. Gladstone merely as an orator who, knowing nothing as it ought to be known, had flung his force into specious sentiments, but as the representative of the numerous cants of the age . . . differing from others in that the cant seemed true to him. He in fact believed him to be one of those fatal figures created by England's evil genius to work irreparable mischief." It must be admitted that Carlyle's censures are so broadcast as to lose half their sting. In uncontroversial writing, it is enough to note that his methods of reforming the world and Mr. Gladstone's were as far as the poles asunder; and the admirers of the latter may console themselves with the reflection that the censor was, at the same time, talking with equal disdain of the scientific discoverers of the age—conspicuously of Mr. Darwin, whom he describes as "evolving man's soul from frog spawn," adding, "I have no patience with these gorilla damnifications of humanity." Other criticisms, as those of George Eliot, whose *Adam Bede* he pronounced "simply dull," display a curious limitation or obtuseness of mind.

One of the pleasantest features of his declining years is the ardour of his attachment to the few staunch friends who helped to cheer and console them. He had a sincere regard for Fitzjames Stephen, "an honest man with heavy strokes"; for Sir Garnet Wolseley, to whom he said in effect, "Your duty one day will be to take away that bauble and close

the doors of the House of Discord"; for Tyndall always; for Lecky, despite their differences; for Moncure Conway, athwart the question of "nigger" philanthropies; for Kingsley and Tennyson and Browning, the last of whom was a frequent visitor till near the end. Froude he had bound to his soul by hoops of steel; and a more faithful disciple and apostle, in intention always, in practice in the main (despite the most perplexing errors of judgment), no professed prophet ever had. But Carlyle's highest praise is reserved for Ruskin, whom he regarded as no mere art critic, but as a moral power worthy to receive and carry onward his own "cross of fire." The relationship between the two great writers is unchequered by any shade of patronage on the one hand, of jealousy or adulation on the other. The elder recognised in the younger an intellect as keen, a spirit as fearless as his own, who in the Eyre controversy had "plunged his rapier to the hilt in the entrails of the Blatant Beast," *i.e.* Popular Opinion. He admired all Ruskin's books; the *Stones of Venice*, the most solid structure of the group, he named "Sermons in Stones"; he resented an attack on *Sesame and Lilies* as if it had been his own; and passages of the *Queen of the Air* went into his heart "like arrows." The *Order of the Rose* has attempted a practical embodiment of the review contemplated by Carlyle, as a counteractive to the money-making practice and expediency-worships of the day.

Meanwhile he had been putting his financial affairs in order. In 1867, on return from Mentone, he had recorded his bequest of the revenues of Craigenputtock for the endowment of three John Welsh bursaries in the University of Edinburgh. In 1873 he made his will, leaving John Forster and Froude his literary executors: a legacy of trust which, on the death of the former, fell to the latter, to whose discretion, by various later bequests, less and less

limited, there was confided the choice—at last almost made a duty—of editing and publishing the manuscripts and journals of himself and his wife.

Early in his seventy-third year (December 1867) Carlyle quotes, "Youth is a garland of roses," adding, "I did not find it such. 'Age is a crown of thorns.' Neither is this altogether true for me. If sadness and sorrow tend to loosen us from life, they make the place of rest more desirable." The talk of Socrates in the *Republic*, and the fine phrases in Cicero's *De Senectute*, hardly touch on the great grief, apart from physical infirmities, of old age—its increasing solitariness. After sixty, a man may make disciples and converts, but few new friends, while the old ones die daily; the "familiar faces" vanish in the night to which there is no morning, and leave nothing in their stead.

During these years Carlyle's former intimates were falling round him like the leaves from an autumn tree, and the kind care of the few survivors, with the solicitous attention of his niece, nurse, and amanuensis, Mary Aitken, left him desolate. Clough had died, and Thomas Erskine, and John Forster, and Wilberforce, with whom he thought he agreed, and Mill, his old champion and ally, with whom he so disagreed that he almost maligned his memory—calling one of the most interesting of autobiographies "the life of a logic-chopping machine." In March 1876 he attended the funeral of Lady Augusta Stanley; in the following month his brother Aleck died in Canada; and in 1878 his brother John at Dumfries. He seemed destined to be left alone; his physical powers were waning. In 1869 he and his last horse "Comet" had their last ride together; later, his right hand failed, and he had to write by dictation. In the gathering gloom he began to look on death as a release from the shreds of life, and to envy the old Roman mode of shuffling off the coil. His thoughts

turned more and more to Hamlet's question of the possible dreams hereafter, and his longing for his lost Jeannie made him beat at the iron gates of the "Undiscovered Country" with a yearning cry, but he could get no answer from reason, and would not seek it in any form of superstition, least of all the latest, that of stealing into heaven "by way of mesmeric and spiritualistic trances." His question and answer are always—

Strength quite a stranger to me. . . . Life is verily a weariness on those terms. Oftenest I feel willing to go, were my time come. Sweet to rejoin, were it only in eternal sleep, those that are away. That . . . is now and then the whisper of my worn-out heart, and a kind of solace to me. "But why annihilation or eternal sleep?" I ask too. They and I are alike in the will of the Highest.

"When," says Mr. Froude, "he spoke of the future and its uncertainties, he fell back invariably on the last words of his favourite hymn—

Wir heissen euch hoffen.

His favourite quotations in those days were Macbeth's "To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow"; Burns's line, "Had we never lo'ed sae kindly,"—thinking of the tomb which he was wont to kiss in the gloamin' in Haddington Church,—the lines from "The Tempest" ending, "our little life is rounded with a sleep," and the dirge in "Cymbeline." He lived on during the last years, save for his quiet walks with his biographer about the banks of the Thames, like a ghost among ghosts, his physical life slowly ebbing till, on February 4th 1881, it ebbed away. His remains were, by his own desire, conveyed to Ecclefechan and laid under the snow-clad soil of the rural churchyard, beside the dust of his kin. He had objected to be buried, should the request be made (as it was by Dean Stanley), in Westminster Abbey : *ἀνδρῶν γὰρ ἐπιφανῶν πᾶσα γῆ τάφος.*

Of no man whose life has been so laid bare to us is it more difficult to estimate the character than that of Thomas Carlyle, and regarding no one of equal eminence, with the possible exception of Byron, has opinion been so divided. After his death there was a carnival of applause from his countrymen in all parts of the globe, from Canton to San Francisco. Their hot zeal, only equalled by that of their revelries over the memory of Burns, was unrestrained by limit, order, or degree. No nation is warmer than the Scotch in worship of its heroes when dead and buried: one perfervid enthusiast says of the former "Atheist, Deist, and Pantheist": "Carlyle is gone; his voice, pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free, will be heard no more": the *Scotsman* newspaper writes of him as "probably the greatest of modern literary men; . . . before the volcanic glare of his *French Revolution* all Epics, ancient and modern, grow pale and shadowy, . . . his like is not now left in the world." More recently a stalwart Aberdonian, on helping to put a bust into a monument, exclaims in a strain of genuine ardour, "I knew Carlyle, and I aver to you that his heart was as large and generous as his brain was powerful; that he was essentially a most lovable man, and that there were depths of tenderness, kindness, benevolence, and most delicate courtesy in him, with all his seeming ruggedness and sternness, such as I have found throughout my life rarely in any human being."

On the other side, a little later, after the publication of the *Reminiscences*, *Blackwood* denounced the "old man eloquent" as "a blatant impostor, who speaks as if he were the only person who knew good from bad. . . . Every one and every thing dealt with in his *History* is treated in the tone of a virtuous Mephistopheles." The *World* remarks that Carlyle has been made to pay the penalty of a posthumous depreciation for a factitious fame; "but the game

of venomous recrimination was begun by himself. . . . There is little that is extraordinary, still less that is heroic in his character. He had no magnanimity about him . . . he was full of littleness and weakness, of shallow dogmatism and of blustering conceit." The *Quarterly*, after alluding to Carlyle's style "as the eccentric expression of eccentricity," denounces his choice of "heroes" as reckless of morality. According to the same authority, he "was not a deep thinker, but he was a great word-painter . . . he has the inspiration as well as the contortions of the Sibyl, the strength as well as the nodosities of the oak. . . . In the *French Revolution* he rarely condescends to plain narrative . . . it resembles a drama at the Porte St. Martin, in so many acts and tableaux. . . . The raisers of busts and statues in his honour are winging and pointing new arrows aimed at the reputation of their most distinguished contemporaries, and doing their best to perpetuate a baneful influence." *Fraser*, no longer edited by Mr. Froude, swells the chorus of dissent: "Money, for which he cared little, only came in quantity after the death of his wife, when everything became indifferent to an old and life-weary man. Who would be great at such a price? Who would buy so much misery with so much labour? Most men like their work. In his Carlyle seems to have found the curse imposed upon Adam. . . . He cultivated contempt of the kindly race of men."

Ample texts for these and similar censures are to be found in the pages of Mr. Froude, and he has been accused by Carlyle's devotees of having supplied this material of malice prepense. No accusation was ever more ridiculously unjust. To the mind of every impartial reader, Froude appears as one of the loyallest if one of the most infatuated of friends. Living towards the close in almost daily communion with his master, and in inevitable contact

with his numerous frailties, he seems to have revered him with a love that passeth understanding, and attributed to him in good faith, as Dryden did in jest to the objects of his mock heroics, every mental as well as every moral power, *e.g.*, "Had Carlyle turned his mind to it he would have been a great philologer." "A great diplomatist was lost in Carlyle." "He would have done better as a man of action than a man of words." By kicking the other diplomatists into the sea, as he threatened to do with the urchins of Kirkcaldy? Froude's panegyrics are in style and tone worthy of that put into the mouth of Pericles by Thucydides, with which the modern biographer closes his only too faithful record. But his claims for his hero—amounting to the assertions that he was never seriously wrong; that he was as good as he was great; that "in the weightier matters of the law his life had been without speck or flaw"; that "such faults as he had were but as the vapours which hang about a mountain, inseparable from the nature of the man"; that he never, in their intercourse, uttered a "trivial word, nor one which he had better have left unuttered"—these claims will never be honoured, for they are refuted in every third page after that on which they appear:—*e.g.* in the Biography, vol. iv. p. 258, we are told that Carlyle's "knowledge was not in points or lines but complete and solid": facing the remark we read, "He liked *ill* men like Humboldt, Laplace, or the author of the *Vestiges*. He refused Darwin's transmutation of species as unproved; he fought against it, though I could see he dreaded that it might turn out true." The statement that "he always spoke respectfully of Macaulay" is soon followed by criticisms that make us exclaim, "Save us from such respect." The extraordinary assertion that Carlyle was "always just in speaking of living men" is safeguarded by the quotation of large utterances of in-

justice and contempt for Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Comte, Balzac, Hugo, Lamb, George Eliot, and disparaging patronage¹ of Scott, of Jeffrey, of Mazzini, and of Mill. The dog-like fidelity of Boswell and Eckermann was fitting to their attitude and capacity; but the spectacle of one great writer surrendering himself to another is a new testimony to the glamour of conversational genius.

Carlyle was a great man, but a great man spoiled, that is largely soured. He was never a Timon; but, while at best a Stoic, he was at worst a Cynic, emulous though disdainful, trying all men by his own standard, and intolerant of a rival on the throne. To this result there contributed the bleak though bracing environment of his early years, amid kindred more noted for strength than for amenity, whom he loved, trusted, and revered, but from whose grim creed, formally at least, he had to tear himself with violent wrenches apart; his purgatory among the border-ruffians of Annan school; his teaching drudgeries; his hermit college days; ten years' struggle for a meagre competence; a life-long groaning under the Nemesis shirt of the irritable yet stubborn constitution to which genius is often heir; and above all his unusually late recognition. There is a good deal of natural bitterness in reference to the long refusal by the publishers of his first original work—an idyll like Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, and our finest prose poem in philosophy. "Popularity," says Emerson, "is for dolls"; but it remains to find the preacher, prophet, or poet wholly impervious to unjust criticism. Neglect which crushes

¹ This patronage of men, some quite, others nearly on his own level, whom he delights in calling "small," "thin," and "poor," as if he were the only big, fat, and rich, is more offensive than spurts of merely dyspeptic abuse. As regards the libels on Lamb, Dr. Ireland has endeavoured to establish that they were written in ignorance of the noble tragedy of "Elia's" life; but this contention cannot be made good as regards the later attacks.

dwarfs only exasperates giants, but to the latter also there is great harm done. Opposition affected Carlyle as it affected Milton, it made him defiant, at times even fierce, to those beyond his own inner circle. When he triumphed, he accepted his success without a boast, but not without reproaches for the past. He was crowned; but his coronation came too late, and the death of his wife paralysed his later years.

Let those who from the Clyde to the Isis, from the Forth to the Cam, make it their pastime to sneer at living worth, compare Ben Jonson's lines,

Your praise and dispraise are to me alike,
One does not stroke me, nor the other strike,

with Samuel Johnson's, "It has been delayed till most of those whom I wished to please are sunk into the grave, and success and failure are empty sounds," and then take to heart the following:—

The "recent return of popularity greater than ever," which I hear of, seems due alone to that late Edinburgh affair; especially to the Edinburgh "Address," and affords new proof of the singularly dark and feeble condition of "public judgment" at this time. No idea, or shadow of an idea, is in that Address but what had been set forth by me tens of times before, and the poor gaping sea of prurient blockheadism receives it as a kind of inspired revelation, and runs to buy my books (it is said), now when I have got quite done with their buying or refusing to buy. If they would give me £10,000 a year and bray unanimously their hosannahs heaven-high for the rest of my life, who now would there be to get the smallest joy or profit from it? To me I feel as if it would be a silent sorrow rather, and would bring me painful retrospections, nothing else.

We require no open-sesame, no clumsy confidence from attachés flaunting their intimacy, to assure us that there were "depths of tenderness" in Carlyle. His susceptibility to the softer influences of nature, of family

life, of his few chosen friends, is apparent in almost every page of his biography, above all in the *Reminiscences*, those supreme records of regret, remorse, and the inspiration of bereavement. There is no surge of sorrow in our literature like that which is perpetually tossed up in the second chapter of the second volume, with the never-to-be-forgotten refrain—

Cherish what is dearest while you have it near you, and wait not till it is far away. Blind and deaf that we are; oh, think, if thou yet love anybody living, wait not till death sweep down the paltry little dust clouds and dissonances of the moment, and all be at last so mournfully clear and beautiful, when it is too late!

Were we asked to bring together the three most pathetic sentences in our tongue since Lear asked the question, "And have his daughters brought him to this pass?" we should select Swift's comment on the lock of Stella, "Only a woman's hair"; the cry of Tennyson's Rizpah, "The bones had moved in my side"; and Carlyle's wail, "Oh that I had you yet but for five minutes beside me, to tell you all!" But in answer we hear only the flapping of the folds of Isis, "strepitumque Acherontis avari."

All of sunshine that remained in my life went out in that sudden moment. All of strength too often seems to have gone. . . . Were it permitted, I would pray, but to whom? I can well understand the invocation of saints. One's prayer now has to be voiceless, done with the heart still, but also with the hands still more. . . . Her birthday. She not here—I cannot keep it for her now, and send a gift to poor old Betty, who next to myself remembers her in life-long love and sacred sorrow. This is all I can do. . . . Time was to bring relief, said everybody; but Time has not to any extent, nor, in truth, did I much wish him

Eurydicen vox ipsa et frigida lingua,
Eurydicen toto referebant flumine ripæ.

Carlyle's pathos, far from being confined to his own calamity, was ready to awake at every touch. "I was walking with him," writes Froude, "one Sunday afternoon in Battersea Park. In the open circle among the trees was a blind man and his daughter, she singing hymns, he accompanying her on some instrument. We stood listening. She sang Faber's 'Pilgrims of the Night.' The words were trivial, but the air, though simple, had something weird and unearthly about it. 'Take me away,' he said, after a few minutes, 'I shall cry if I stay longer.'"

The melancholy, "often as of deep misery frozen torpid," that runs through his writing, that makes him forecast death in life, and paint the springs of nature in winter hue, the "hoarse sea," the "bleared skies," the sunsets "beautiful and brief and wae," compels our compassion in a manner quite different from the pictures of Sterne, and De Quincey, and other colour dramatists, because we feel it is as genuine as the melancholy of Burns. Both had the relief of humour, but Burns only of the two was capable of gaiety. "Look up there," said Leigh Hunt, pointing to the starry skies, "look at that glorious harmony that sings with infinite voices an eternal song of hope in the soul of man." "Eh, it's a sair sicht," was the reply.

We have referred to a few out of a hundred instances of Carlyle's practical benevolence. To all deserving persons in misfortune he was a good Samaritan, and like all benefactors the dupe of some undeserving. Charity may be, like maternal affection, a form of self-indulgence, but it is so only to kind-hearted men. In all that relates to money Carlyle's career is exemplary. He had too much common sense to affect to despise it, and was restive when he was underpaid; he knew that the labourer was worthy of his hire. But, after hacking for Brewster he cannot be said to have ever worked for wages, his concern was rather

with the quality of his work, and, regardless of results, he always did his best. A more unworldly man never lived; from his first savings he paid ample tributes to filial piety and fraternal kindness, and to the end of his life retained the simple habits in which he had been trained. He hated waste of all kinds, save in words, and carried his home frugalities even to excess. In writing to James Aitken, engaged to his sister, "the Craw," he says, "remember in marriage you have undertaken to do to others as you would wish they should do to you." But this rede he did not reckon.

"Carlyle," writes Longfellow, "was one of those men who sacrificed their happiness to their work"; the misfortune is that the sacrifice did not stop with himself. He seemed made to live with no one but himself. Alternately courteous and cross-grained, all his dramatic power went into his creations; he could not put himself into the place of those near him. Essentially perhaps the bravest man of his age, he would turn not an inch aside for threat or flattery; *integer vitæ*, conscience never made him a coward. He bore great calamities with the serenity of a Marcus Aurelius: his reception of the loss of his first volume of the *French Revolution* was worthy of Sidney or of Newton: his letters, when the successive deaths of almost all that were dearest left him desolate, are among the noblest, the most resigned, the most pathetic in biography. Yet, says Mr. Froude, in a judgment which every careful reader must endorse: "Of all men I have ever seen Carlyle was the least patient of the common woes of humanity." "A positive Christian," says Mrs. Carlyle, "in bearing others' pain, he was a roaring Thor when himself pricked by a pin," and his biographer corroborates this: "If matters went well with himself, it never occurred to him that they could be going ill with any one else; and, on the

other hand, if he were uncomfortable he required all the world to be uncomfortable along with him." He did his work with more than the tenacity of a Prescott or a Fawcett, but no man ever made so much noise over it as this apostle of silence. ("Sins of passion he could forgive, but those of insincerity never.") Carlyle has no tinge of insincerity; his writing, his conversation, his life, is absolutely, dangerously transparent. His utter genuineness was in the long run one of the sources of his success. He always, if we allow for a habit of rhetorical exaggeration, felt what he made others feel.

Sullen moods, and "words at random sent," those judging him from a distance can easily condone; the errors of a hot head are pardonable to one who, in his calmer hours, was ready to confess them. "Your temptation and mine," he writes to his brother Alexander, "is a tendency to imperiousness and indignant self-help; and, if no wise theoretical, yet, practical forgetfulness and tyrannical contempt of other men." His nicknaming mania was the inheritance of a family failing, always fostered by the mocking-bird at his side. Humour, doubtless, ought to discount many of his criticisms. Dean Stanley, in his funeral sermon, charitably says, that in pronouncing the population of England to be "thirty millions, mostly fools," Carlyle merely meant that "few are chosen and strait is the gate," generously adding—"There was that in him, in spite of his contemptuous descriptions of the people, which endeared him to those who knew him best. The idols of their market-place he trampled under foot, but their joys and sorrows, their cares and hopes, were to him revered things." Another critic pleads for his discontent that it had in it a noble side, like that of Faust, and that his harsh judgments of eminent men were based on the belief that they had allowed meaner to triumph over

higher impulses, or influences of society to injure their moral fibre. This plea, however, fails to cover the whole case. Carlyle's ignorance in treating men who moved in spheres apart from his own, as the leaders of science, definite theological enlightenment, or even poetry and arts, was an intellectual rather than a moral flaw; but in the implied assertion, "what I can't do is not worth doing," we have to regret the influence of an enormous egotism stunting enormous powers, which, beginning with his student days, possessed him to the last. The fame of Newton, Leibnitz, Gibbon, whose works he came to regard as the spoon-meat of his "rude untutored youth," is beyond the range of his or of any shafts. When he trod on Mazzini's pure patriot career, as a "rose-water imbecility," or maligned Mill's intrepid thought as that of a mere machine, he was astray on more delicate ground, and alienated some of his truest friends. Among the many curses of our nineteenth-century literature denounced by its leading Censor, the worst, the want of loyalty among literary men, he fails to denounce because he largely shares in it. "No sadder proof," he declares, "can be given by a man of his own littleness than disbelief in great men," and no one has done more to retrieve from misconception the memories of heroes of the past; but rarely does either he or Mrs. Carlyle say a good word for any considerable English writer then living. It is true that he criticises, more or less disparagingly, all his own works, from *Sartor*, of which he remarks that "only some ten pages are fused and harmonious," to his self-entitled "rigmarole on the Norse Kings": but he would not let his enemy say so; nor his friend. Mill's just strictures on the "Nigger Pamphlet" he treats as the impertinence of a boy, and only to Emerson would he grant the privilege to hold his own. *Per contra*, he overestimated those who were content to be his echoes.

Material help he refused with a red Indian pride; intellectual he used and slighted. He renders scant justice to those who had preceded him in his lines of historical investigation, as if they had been poachers on his premises, *e.g.* Heath, the royalist writer of the Commonwealth time, is "carrion Heath": Noble, a former biographer of Cromwell, is "my reverend imbecile friend": his predecessors in *Friedrich*, as Schlosser, Preuss, Ranke, Förster, Vehse, are "dark chaotic dullards whose books are mere blotches of printed stupor, tumbled mountains of marine stores"—criticism valueless even when it raises the laughter due to a pantomime. Carlyle assailed three sets of people:—

1. Real humbugs, or those who had behaved, or whom he believed to have behaved, badly to him.
2. Persons from whom he differed, or whom he could not understand—as Shelley, Keats, Lamb, Coleridge, and the leaders of Physics and Metaphysics.
3. Persons who had befriended, but would not give him an unrestricted homage or an implicit following, as Mill, Mazzini, Miss Martineau, etc.

The last series of assaults are hard to pardon. Had his strictures been always just, so winged with humorous epigram, they would have blasted a score of reputations: as it is they have only served to mar his own. He was a typical Scotch student of the better class, stung by the *ὄλτρος* of their ambitious competition, and restless push, wanting in repose, never like

a gentleman at ease
With moral breadth of temperament,

too apt to note his superiority with the sneer, "they call this man as good as me." Bacon, in one of his finest

antitheses, draws a contrast between the love of Excellence and the love of Excelling. Carlyle is possessed by both; he had none of the exaggerated caution which in others of his race is apt to degenerate into moral cowardice: but when he thought himself trod on he became, to use his own figure, "a rattlesnake," and put out fangs like those of the griffins curiously, if not sardonically, carved on the tombs of his family in the churchyard at Ecclefechan.

Truth, in the sense of saying what he thought, was one of his ruling passions. To one of his brothers on the birth of a daughter, he writes, "Train her to this, as the cornerstone of all morality, to stand by the truth, to abhor a lie as she does hell-fire." The "gates of hell" is the phrase of Achilles; but Carlyle has no real point of contact with the Greek love of abstract truth. He objects that "Socrates is terribly at ease in Zion": he liked no one to be at ease anywhere. He is angry with Walter Scott because he hunted with his friends over the breezy heath instead of mooning alone over twilight moors. Read Scott's *Memoirs* in the morning, the *Reminiscences* at night, and dispute if you like about the greater genius, but never about the healthier, better, and larger man.

Hebraism, says Matthew Arnold, is the spirit which obeys the mandate, "walk by your light." Hellenism the spirit which remembers the other, "have a care your light be not darkness"; the former prefers doing to thinking, the latter is bent on finding the truth it loves. Carlyle is a Hebraist unrelieved and unretrieved by the Hellene. A man of inconsistencies, egotisms, Alpine grandeurs and crevasses, let us take from him what the gods or proto-plasms have allowed. His way of life,¹ duly admired for its

¹ In the *Times* of February 7th 1881, there appeared an interesting account of Carlyle's daily routine. "No book hack could have surpassed the regularity and industry with which he worked early and

stern temperance, its rigidity of noble aim—eighty years spent in contempt of favour, plaudit, or reward, left him austere to frailty other than his own, and wrapt him in the repellent isolation which is the wrong side of uncompromising dignity. He was too great to be, in the common sense, conceited. All his consciousness of power left him with the feeling of Newton, "I am a child gathering shells on the shore": but what sense he had of fallibility arose from his glimpse of the infinite sea, never from any suspicion that, in any circumstances, he might be wrong and another mortal right: Shelley's lines on Byron—

The sense that he was greater than his kind
Had struck, methinks, his eagle spirit blind
By gazing on its own exceeding light.

fit him, like Ruskin's verdict, "What can you say of Carlyle but that he was born in the clouds and struck by the lightning?" which withers while it immortalises.

late in his small attic. A walk before breakfast was part of the day's duties. At ten o'clock in the morning, whether the spirit moved him or not, he took up his pen and laboured hard until three o'clock. Nothing, not even the opening of the morning letters, was allowed to distract him. Then came walking, answering letters, and seeing friends. . . . In the evening he read and prepared for the work of the morrow."