CHAPTER X

CARLYLE'S RELIGION AND ETHICS—RELATION TO PREDECESSORS—INFLUENCE

THE same advance or retrogression that appears in Carlyle's Politics is traceable in his Religion; though it is impossible to record the stages of the change with even an equal approach to precision. Religion, in the widest sense—faith in some supreme Power above us yet acting for us—was the great factor of his inner life. But when we further question his Creed, he is either bewilderingly inconsistent or designedly vague. The answer he gives is that of Schiller: "Welche der Religionen? Keine von allen. Warum? Aus Religion." In 1870 he writes: "I begin to think religion again possible for whoever will piously struggle upwards and sacredly refuse to tell lies: which indeed will mostly mean refusal to speak at all on that topic." This and other implied protests against intrusive inquisition are valid in the case of those who keep their own secrets: it is impertinence to "peer and botanise" among the sanctuaries of a poet or politician or historian who does not himself open their doors. But Carlyle has done this in all his books. A reticent writer may veil his convictions on every subject save that on which he writes. An avowed preacher or prophet cannot escape interrogation as to his text.

With all the evidence before us—his collected works, his friendly confidences, his journals, his fragmentary papers, as the interesting series of jottings entitled "Spiritual Optics," and the partial accounts to Emerson and others of the design of the "Exodus from Houndsditch"—it remains impossible to formulate Carlyle's Theology. We know that he abandoned the ministry, for which he was destined, because, at an early date, he found himself at irreconcilable variance, not on matters of detail but on essentials, with the standards of Scotch Presbyterianism. We know that he never repented or regretted his resolve; that he went, as continuously as possible for a mind so liable to fits and starts, further and further from the faith of his fathers; but that he remained to the last so much affected by it, and by the ineffaceable impress of early associations, that he has been plausibly called "a Calvinist without dogma," "a Calvinist without Christianity," "a Puritan who had lost his creed." We know that he revered the character of Christ, and theoretically accepted the ideal of self-sacrifice: the injunction to return good for evil he never professed to accept; and vicarious sacrifice was contrary to his whole philosophy, which taught that every man must "dree his weird." We know that he not only believed in God as revealed in the larger Bible, the whole history of the human race, but that he threatened, almost with hell-fire, all who dared on this point to give refuge to a doubt. Finally, he believed both in fate and in free-will, in good and evil as powers at internecine war, and in the greater strength and triumph of good at some very far distant date. If we desire to know more of Carlyle's creed we must proceed by "the method of exclusions," and note, in the first place, what he did *not* believe. This process is simplified by the fact that he assailed all convictions other than his own.

Half his teaching is a protest, in variously eloquent phrase, against all forms of *Materialism* and *Hedonism*, which he brands as "worships of Moloch and Astarte," forgetting that progress in physical welfare may lead not only to material, but to mental, if not spiritual, gain. Similarly he denounces *Atheism*, never more vehemently than in his Journals of 1868-1869:—

Had no God made this world it were an insupportable place. Laws without a lawgiver, matter without spirit is a gospel of dirt. All that is good, generous, wise, right . . . who or what could by any possibility have given it to me, but One who first had it to give! This is not logic, it is axiom. . . . Poor "Comtism, ghastliest of algebraic spectralities." . . . Canst *thou* by searching find out God? I am not surprised thou canst not, vain fool. If they do abolish God from their poor bewildered hearts, there will be seen such a world as few are dreaming of.

Carlyle calls evidence from all quarters, appealing to Napoleon's question, "Who made all that?" and to Friedrich's belief that intellect "could not have been put into him by an entity that had none of its own," in support of what he calls the Eternal Fact of Facts, to which he clings as to the Rock of Ages, the sole foundation of hope and of morality to one having at root little confidence in his fellow-men.

If people are only driven upon virtuous conduct . . . by association of ideas, and there is no "Infinite Nature of Duty," the world, I should say, had better count its spoons to begin with, and look out for hurricanes and earthquakes to end with.

Carlyle hazardously confessed that as regards the foundations of his faith and morals, with Napoleon and Friedrich II. on his side, he had against him the advancing tide of modern *Science*. He did not attempt to disprove its facts, or, as Emerson, to sublimate them into a new idealism; he scoffed at and made light of them, *e.g.*—

Geology has got rid of Moses, which surely was no very sublime achievement either. I often think . . . it is pretty much all that science in this age has done. . . . Protoplasm (unpleasant doctrine that we are all, soul and body, made of a kind of blubber, found in nettles among other organisms) appears to be delightful to many. . . . Yesterday there came a pamphlet published at Lewes, a hallelujah on the advent of Atheism. . . . The real joy of Julian (the author) was what surprised me, like the shout of a hyæna on finding that the whole universe was actually carrion. In about seven minutes my great Julian was torn in two and lying in the place fit for him. . . . Descended from Gorillas! Then where is the place for a Creator? Man is only a little higher than the tadpoles, says our new Evangelist. . . . Nobody need argue with these people. Logic never will decide the matter, or will seem to decide it their way. He who traces nothing of God in his own soul, will never find God in the world of matter—mere circlings of force there, of iron regulation, of universal death and merciless indifference. . . . Matter itself is either Nothing or else a product due to man's *mind*. . . . The fast-increasing flood of Atheism on me takes no hold—does not even wet the soles of my feet.[1]

"Carlyle," says one of his intimates, "speaks as if Darwin wished to rob or to insult him." *Scepticism* proper fares as hardly in his hands as definite denial. It is, he declares, "a fatal condition," and, almost in the spirit of the inquisitors, he attributes to it moral vice as well as intellectual weakness, calling it an "atrophy, a disease of the whole soul," "a state of mental paralysis," etc. His fallacious habit of appeal to consequences, which in others he would have scouted as a commonplace of the pulpit, is conspicuous in his remark on Hume's view of life as "a most melancholy theory," according to which, in the words of Jean Paul, "heaven becomes a gas, God a force, and the second world a grave." He fails to see that all such

[1] Cf. Othello, "Not a jot, not a jot." Carlyle writes on this question with the agitation of one himself not quite at ease, with none of the calmness of a faith perfectly secure.

appeals are beside the question; and deserts the ground of his answer to John Sterling's expostulation, "that is downright Pantheism": "What if it were Pot-theism if it is *true*?" It is the same inconsistency which, in practice, led his sympathy for suffering to override his Stoic theories; but it vitiated his reasoning, and made it impossible for him to appreciate the calm, yet legitimately emotional, religiosity of Mill. Carlyle has vetoed all forms of so-called *Orthodoxy*—whether Catholic or Protestant, of Churches High or Low; he abhorred Puseyism, Jesuitry, spoke of the "Free Kirk and other rubbish," and recorded his definite disbelief, in any ordinary sense, in Revelation and in Miracles. "It is as certain as Mathematics that no such thing has ever been on earth." History is a perpetual revelation of God's will and justice, and the stars in their courses are a perpetual miracle, is his refrain. *This is not what orthodoxy means*, and no one was more intolerant than he of rhetorical devices, on such matters, to slur the difference between "Yes" and "No." But having decided that his own "Exodus from Houndsditch" might only open the way to the wilderness, he would allow no one else to take in hand his uncompleted task; and disliked Strauss and Renan even more than he disliked Colenso. "He spoke to me once," says Mr. Froude, "with loathing of the *Vie de Jésus*." I asked if a true life could be written. He said, "Yes, certainly, if it were right to do so; but it is not." Still more strangely he writes to Emerson:—

> You are the only man of the Unitarian persuasion whom I could unobstructedly like. The others that I have seen were all a kind of half-way-house characters, who I thought should, if they had not wanted courage, have ended in unbelief, in faint possible *Theism*; which I like considerably worse than Atheism. Such, I could not but feel, deserve the fate they find here; the bat fate; to be killed among the bats as a bird, among the birds as a bat.

What then is left for Carlyle's Creed? Logically little, emotionally much. If it must be defined, it was that of a Theist with a difference. A spirit of flame from the empyrean, he found no food in the cold *Deism* of the eighteenth century, and brought down the marble image, from its pedestal, as by the music of the "Winter's Tale," to live among men and inspire them. He inherited and, *coûte que coûte*, determined to persist in the belief that there was a personal God—"a Maker, voiceless, formless, within our own soul." To Emerson he writes in 1836, "My belief in a special Providence grows yearly stronger, unsubduable, impregnable"; and later, "Some strange belief in a special Providence was always in me at intervals." Thus, while asserting that "all manner of pulpits are as good as broken and abolished," he clings to the old Ecclefechan days.

"To the last," says Mr. Froude, "he believed as strongly as ever Hebrew prophet did in spiritual religion," but if we ask the nature of the God on whom all relies, he cannot answer even with the Apostles' Creed. Is He One or Three? "Wer darf ihn nennen." Carlyle's God is not a mere "tendency that makes for righteousness"; He is a guardian and a guide, to be addressed in the words of Pope's *Universal Prayer*, which he adopted as his own. A personal God does not mean a great Figure Head of the Universe,—Heine's fancy of a venerable old man, before he became "a knight" of the Holy Ghost,—it means a Supreme Power, Love, or Justice, having relations to the individual man: in this sense Carlyle believed in Him, though more as Justice, exacting "the terriblest penalties," than as Love, preaching from the Mount of Olives. He never entered into controversies about the efficacy of prayer; but, far from deriding, he recommended it as "a turning of one's soul to the Highest." In 1869 he writes:—

I occasionally feel able to wish, with my whole softened heart—it is my only form of prayer—"Great Father, oh, if Thou canst, have pity on her and on me and on all such!" In this at least there is no harm.

And about the same date to Erskine:—

"Our Father;" in my sleepless tossings, these words, that brief and grand prayer, came strangely into my mind with an altogether new emphasis; as if written and shining for me in mild pure splendour on the black bosom of the night there; when I as it were read them word by word, with a sudden check to my imperfect wanderings, with a sudden softness of composure which was much unexpected. Not for perhaps thirty or forty years had I once formally repeated that prayer: nay, I never felt before how intensely the voice of man's soul it is, the inmost inspiration of all that is high and pious in poor human nature, right worthy to be recommended with an "After this manner pray ye."

Carlyle holds that if we do our duty—the best work we can—and faithfully obey His laws, living soberly and justly, God will do the best for us in this life. As regards the next we have seen that he ended with Goethe's hope. At an earlier date he spoke more confidently. On his father's death (*Reminiscences*, vol. i. p. 65) he wrote:—

Man follows man. His life is as a tale that has been told: yet under time does there not lie eternity? . . . Perhaps my father, all that essentially was my father, is even now near me, with me. Both he and I are with God. Perhaps, if it so please God, we shall in some higher state of being meet one another, recognise one another. . . . The possibility, nay (in some way) the certainty, of perennial existence daily grows plainer to me.

On the death of Mrs. Welsh he wrote to his wife: "We shall yet go to her. God is great. God is good": and earlier, in 1835-1836, to Emerson on the loss of his brother:—

What a thin film it is that divides the living and the dead.

Your brother is in very deed and truth with God, where both you and I are. . . . Perhaps we shall all meet YONDER, and the tears be wiped from all eyes. One thing is no perhaps: surely we shall all meet, if it be the will of the Maker of us. If it be not His will, then is it not better so?

After his wife's death, naturally, the question of Immortality came uppermost in his mind; but his conclusions are, like those of Burns, never dogmatic:—

The truth about the matter is absolutely hidden from us. "In my Father's house are many mansions." Yes, if you are God you may have a right to say so; if you are a man what do you know more than I, or any of us?

And later—

What if Omnipotence should actually have said, "Yes, poor mortals, such of you as have gone so far shall be permitted to go farther"?

To Emerson in 1867 he writes:—

I am as good as without hope and without fear; a gloomily serious, silent, and sad old man, gazing into the final chasm of things in mute dialogue with "Death, Judgment, and Eternity" (dialogue mute on both sides), not caring to discourse with poor articulate speaking mortals, on their sorts of topics—disgusted with the world and its roaring nonsense, which I have no further thought of lifting a finger to help, and only try to keep out of the way of, and shut my door against.

There can be no question of the sincerity of Carlyle's conviction that he had to make war on credulity and to assail the pretences of a *formal Belief* (which he regards as even worse than Atheism) in order to grapple with real Unbelief. After all explanations of Newton or Laplace, the Universe is, to him, a mystery, and we ourselves the miracle of miracles; sight and knowledge leave us no "less forlorn," and beneath all the soundings of science there is a deeper deep. It is this frame of mind that qualified him to be the exponent of religious epochs in history. "By this

alone," wrote Dr. Chalmers, "he has done so much to vindicate and bring to light the Augustan age of Christianity in England," adding that it is the secret also of the great writer's appreciation of the higher Teutonic literature. His sombre rather than consolatory sense of "God in History," his belief in the mission of righteousness to constrain unrighteousness, and his Stoic view that good and evil are absolute opposites, are his links with the Puritans, whom he habitually exalts in variations of the following strain :—

> The age of the Puritans has gone from us, its earnest purpose awakens now no reverence in our frivolous hearts. Not the body of heroic Puritanism alone which was bound to die, but the soul of it also, which was and should have been, and yet shall be immortal, has, for the present, passed away.

Yet Goethe, the only man of recent times whom he regarded with a feeling akin to worship, was in all essentials the reverse of a Puritan.

To Carlyle's, as to most substantially emotional works, may be applied the phrase made use of in reference to the greatest of all the series of ancient books—

> Hic liber est in quo quisquis sua dogmata quærit ;
> Invenit hoc libro dogmata quisque sua.

From passages like those above quoted—his complaints of the falling off of old Scotch faith ; his references to the kingdom of a God who has written "in plain letters on the human conscience a Law that all may read" ; his insistence that the great soul of the world is just ; his belief in religion as a rule of conduct, and his sympathy with the divine depths of sorrow—from all these many of his Scotch disciples persist in maintaining that their master was to the end essentially a Christian. The question between them and other critics who assert that "he had renounced Christianity" is to some extent, not wholly,

a matter of nomenclature; it is hard exactly to decide it in the case of a man who so constantly found again in feeling what he had abandoned in thought. Carlyle's Religion was to the last an inconsistent mixture, not an amalgam, of his mother's and of Goethe's. The Puritan in him never dies; he attempts in vain to tear off the husk that cannot be separated from its kernel. He believes in no historical Resurrection, Ascension, or Atonement, yet hungers and thirsts for a supramundane source of Law, and holds fast by a faith in the Nemesis of Greek, Goth, and Jew. He abjures half-way houses; but is withheld by pathetic memories of the church spires and village graveyards of his youth from following his doubts to their conclusion; yet he gives way to his negation in his reference to "old Jew lights now burnt out," and in the half-despair of his expression to Froude about the Deity Himself, "He does nothing." Professor Masson says that "Carlyle had abandoned the Metaphysic of Christianity while retaining much of its Ethic." To reverse this dictum would be an overstrain on the other side: but the *Metaphysic* of Calvinism is precisely what he retained; the alleged *Facts* of Revelation he discarded; of the *Ethic* of the Gospels he accepted perhaps the lesser half, and he distinctly ceased to regard the teaching of Christ as final.[1] His doctrine of Renunciation (suggested by the passage about the three Reverences in *Meister's Travels*) is Carlyle's transmutation, if not transfiguration, of Puritanism; but it took neither in him nor in Goethe any very consistent form, save that it meant Temperance, keeping the body well under the control of the head, the will strong, and striving, through all the lures of sense, to attain to some ideal life.

[1] A passage in Mrs. Sutherland Orr's *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, p. 173, is decisive on this point, and perhaps too emphatic for general quotation.

Both write of Christianity as "a thing of beauty," a perennial power, a spreading tree, a fountain of youth; but Goethe was too much of a Greek—though, as has been said, "a very German Greek"—to be, in any proper sense of the word, a Christian; Carlyle too much of a Goth. His Mythology was Norse; his Ethics, despite his prejudice against the race, largely Jewish. He proclaimed his code with the thunders of Sinai, not in the reconciling voice of the Beatitudes. He gives or forces on us world-old truths splendidly set, with a leaning to strength and endurance rather than to advancing thought. He did not, says a fine critic of morals, recognise that "morality also has passed through the straits." He did not really believe in Content, which has been called the Catholic, nor in Progress, more questionably styled the Protestant virtue. His often excellent practical rule to "do the duty nearest to hand" may be used to gag the intellect in its search after the goal; so that even his Everlasting Yea, as a predetermined affirmation, may ultimately result in a deeper negation.[1]

"Duty," to him as to Wordsworth, "stern daughter of the voice of God," has two aspects, on each of which he dwells with a persistent iteration. The *first* is *Surrender* to something higher and wider than ourselves. That he has nowhere laid the line between this abnegation and the self-assertion which in his heroes he commends, partly means that correct theories of our complex life are impossible; but Matthew Arnold's criticism, that his Ethics "are made paradoxical by his attack on Happiness, which he should rather have referred to as the result of Labour and of Truth," can only be rebutted by the assertion that the pursuit of pleasure as an end defeats itself. The *second*

[1] *Vide* Professor Jones's *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*, pp. 66-90.

aspect of his "Duty" is *Work*. His master Goethe is to him as Apollo to Hercules, as Shakespeare to Luther; the one entire as the chrysolite, the other like the Schreckhorn rent and riven; the words of the former are oracles, of the latter battles; the one contemplates and beautifies truth, the other wrestles and fights for it. Carlyle has a limited love of abstract truth; of action his love is unlimited. His lyre is not that of Orpheus, but that of Amphion which built the walls of Thebes. *Laborare est orare.* He alone is honourable who does his day's work by sword or plough or pen. Strength is the crown of toil. Action converts the ring of necessity that girds us into a ring of duty, frees us from dreams, and makes us men.

> The midnight phantoms feel the spell,
> The shadows sweep away.

There are few grander passages in literature than some of those litanies of labour. They have the roll of music that makes armies march, and if they have been made so familiar as to cease to seem new, it is largely owing to the power of the writer which has compelled them to become common property.

Carlyle's practical Ethics, though too little indulgent to the light and play of life, in which he admitted no ἀδιαφόρα, and only the relaxation of a rare genial laugh, are more satisfactory than his conception of their sanction, which is grim. His "Duty" is a categorical imperative, imposed from without by a taskmaster who has "written in flame across the sky, 'Obey, unprofitable servant.'" He saw the infinite above and around, but not *in* the finite. He insisted on the community of the race, and struck with a bolt any one who said, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

> All things, the minutest that man does, influence all men, the very look of his face blesses or curses. . . . It is a mathe-

matical fact that the casting of this pebble from my hand alters the centre of gravity of the universe.

But he left a great gulf fixed between man and God, and so failed to attain to the Optimism after which he often strove. He held, with Browning, that "God's in His heaven," but not that "All's right with the world." His view was the Zoroastrian *ἀθάνατος μάχη*, "in God's world presided over by the prince of the powers of the air," a "divine infernal universe." The Calvinism of his mother, who said "The world is a lie, but God is truth," landed him in an *impasse*; he could not answer the obvious retort,—Did then God make and love a lie, or make it hating it? There must have been some other power *τὸ ἕτερον*, or, as Mill in his Apologia for *Theism* puts it, a limit to the assumed Omnipotence. Carlyle, accepting neither alternative, inconsequently halts between them; and his prevailing view of mankind [1] adds to his dilemma. He imposes an "infinite duty on a finite being," as Calvin imposes an infinite punishment for a finite fault. He does not see that mankind sets its hardest tasks to itself; or that, as Emerson declares "the assertion of our weakness and deficiency is the fine innuendo by which the soul makes its enormous claim." Hence, according to Mazzini, "He stands between the individual and the infinite without hope or guide, and crushes the human being by comparing him with God. From his lips, so daring, we seem to hear every instant the cry of the Breton mariner, 'My God, protect me; my bark is so small and Thy ocean so vast.'" Similarly, the critic of Browning, above referred to, concludes of the great prose writer, whom he has called the poet's twin:

[1] Some one remarked to Friedrich II. that the philanthropist Sulzer said, "Men are by nature good." "Ach, mein lieber Sulzer," ejaculated Fritz, as quoted approvingly by Carlyle, "er kennt nicht diese verdammte Rasse."

"He has let loose confusion upon us. He has brought us within sight of the future: he has been our guide in the wilderness; but he died there and was denied the view from Pisgah."

Carlyle's Theism is defective because it is not sufficiently Pantheistic; but, in his view of the succession of events in the "roaring loom of time," of the diorama of majesty girt by mystery, he has found a cosmic Pantheism and given expression to it in a passage which is the culmination of the English prose eloquence as surely as Wordsworth's great Ode is the high-tide mark of the English verse, of this century:—

Are we not spirits shaped into a body, into an Appearance; and that fade away again into air and Invisibility? This is no metaphor, it is a simple scientific fact: we start out of Nothingness, take figure, and are Apparitions; round us as round the veriest spectre is Eternity, and to Eternity minutes are as years and æons. Come there not tones of Love and Faith as from celestial harp-strings, like the Song of beatified Souls? And again do we not squeak and gibber and glide, bodeful and feeble and fearful, and revel in our mad dance of the Dead,—till the scent of the morning air summons us to our still home; and dreamy Night becomes awake and Day? Where now is Alexander of Macedon; does the steel host that yelled in fierce battle shouts at Issus and Arbela remain behind him; or have they all vanished utterly, even as perturbed goblins must? Napoleon, too, with his Moscow retreats and Austerlitz campaigns, was it all other than the veriest spectre hunt; which has now with its howling tumult that made night hideous flitted away? Ghosts! There are nigh a thousand million walking the earth openly at noontide; some half hundred have vanished from it, some half hundred have arisen in it, ere thy watch ticks once. O Heaven, it is mysterious, it is awful to consider that we not only carry each a future ghost within him, but are in very deed ghosts.[1] These limbs, whence had we them; this stormy Force; this life-blood with its burning

[1] One of the strangest freaks of literary heredity is that this phrase seems to have suggested the title of Ibsen's much-debated play.

passion? They are dust and shadow; a shadow system gathered round our *me*, wherein through some moments or years the Divine Essence is to be revealed in the Flesh. So has it been from the beginning, so will it be to the end. Generation after generation takes to itself the form of a body; and forth issuing from Cimmerian Night on Heaven's mission appears. What force and fire there is in each he expends, one grinding in the mill of Industry; one hunter-like climbing the giddy Alpine heights of science; one madly dashed in pieces on the rocks of Strife in war with his fellow, and then the heaven-sent is recalled; his earthly Vesture falls away, and soon even to sense becomes a vanished shadow. Thus, like some wild flaming, wild thundering train of Heaven's Artillery, does this mysterious Mankind thunder and flame in long-drawn, quick-succeeding grandeur through the unknown deep. Thus, like a God-created fire-breathing spirit host, we emerge from the Mane, haste stormfully across the astonished earth, then plunge again into the Mane. Earth's mountains are levelled and her seas filled up. On the hardest adamant some footprint of us is stamped; the rear of the host read traces of the earliest van. But whence, O Heaven, whither? Sense knows not. Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God and to God.

Volumes might be written on Carlyle's relations, of sentiment, belief, opinion, method of thought, and manner of expression, to other thinkers. His fierce independence, and sense of his own prophetic mission to the exclusion of that of his predecessors and compeers, made him often unconscious of his intellectual debts, and only to the Germans, who impressed his comparatively plastic youth, is he disposed adequately to acknowledge them. Outside the Hebrew Scriptures he seems to have been wholly unaffected by the writings and traditions of the East, which exercised so marked an influence on his New England disciples. He never realised the part played by the philosophers of Greece in moulding the speculations of modern Europe. He knew Plato mainly through the Socratic dialogues. There is, however, a passage in a letter to

Emerson (March 13th 1853) which indicates that he had read, comparatively late in life, some portions of *The Republic*. "I was much struck with Plato last year, and his notions about Democracy—mere *Latter-Day Pamphlets, saxa et faces* . . . refined into empyrean radiance and the lightning of the gods." The tribute conveyed in the comparison is just; for there is nothing but community of political view between the bitter acorns dropped from the gnarled border oak and the rich fruit of the finest olive in Athene's garden. But the coincidences of opinion between the ancient and the modern writer are among the most remarkable in literary history. We can only refer, without comments, to a few of the points of contact in this strange conjunction of minds far as the poles asunder. Plato and Carlyle are both possessed with the idea that they are living in a degenerate age, and they attribute its degeneracy to the same causes:—*Laissez faire*; the growth of luxury; the effeminate preference of Lydian to Dorian airs in music, education, and life; the decay of the Spartan and growth of the Corinthian spirit; the habit of lawlessness culminating in the excesses of Democracy, which they describe in language as nearly identical as the difference of the ages and circumstances admit. They propose the same remedies:—a return to "purer manners, nobler laws," with the best men in the State to regulate and administer them. Philosophers, says Plato, are to be made guardians, and they are to govern, not for gain or glory, but for the common weal. They need not be happy in the ordinary sense, for there is a higher than selfish happiness, the love of the good. To this love they must be *systematically educated* till they are fit to be kings and priests in the ideal state; if they refuse they *must*, when their turn comes, be *made to govern*. Compare the following declarations of Carlyle:—

Aristocracy and Priesthood, a Governing class and a Teaching class—these two sometimes combined in one, a Pontiff King—there did not society exist without those two vital elements, there will none exist. Whenever there are born Kings of men you had better seek them out and *breed them to the work*. . . . The few wise will have to take command of the innumerable foolish, they *must be got to do it*.

The Ancient and the Modern, the Greek and the Teuton, are further curiously at one:—in their dislike of physical or mental Valetudinarianism (cf. *Rep.* Bs. ii. and iii. and *Characteristics*); in their protests against the morality of consequences, of rewards and punishments as motives for the highest life (the just man, says Plato, crucified is better than the unjust man crowned); in their contempt for the excesses of philanthropy and the pampering of criminals (cf. *Rep.* B. viii.); in their strange conjunctions of free-thinking and intolerance. Plato in the Laws enacts that he who speaks against[1] the gods shall be first fined, then imprisoned, and at last, if he persists in his impiety, put to death; yet he had as little belief in the national religion as Carlyle. They both accept Destiny,—the Parcæ or the Norns spin the threads of life,—and yet both admit a sphere of human choice. In the Republic the souls select their lots, with Carlyle man can modify his fate. The juxtaposition in each of Humour and Pathos (cf. Plato's account of the dogs in a Democracy, and Carlyle's "Nigger gone masterless among the pumpkins," and, for pathos, the image of the soul encrusted by the world as the marine Glaucus, or the Vision of Er and Natural Supernaturalism) is another contact. Both held that philosophers and heroes were few, and yet both leant to a sort of Socialism, under State control; they both assail Poetry and deride the Stage (cf. *Rep.* B. ii. and

[1] Rousseau, in the "Contrat Social," also assumes this position; allowing freedom of thought, but banishing the citizen who shows disrespect to the State Religion.

B. x. with Carlyle on "The Opera"), while each is the greatest prose poet of his race; they are united in hatred of orators, who "would circumvent the gods," and in exalting action and character over "the most sweet voices"—the one enforcing his thesis in the "language of the gods," the other preaching silence in forty volumes of eloquent English speech.

Carlyle seems to have known little of Aristotle. His Stoicism was indigenous; but he always alludes with deference to the teaching of the Porch. Marcus Aurelius, the nearest type of the Philosophic King, must have riveted his regard as an instance of the combination of thought and action; and some interesting parallels have been drawn between their views of life as an arena on which there is much to be done and little to be known, a passage from time to a vague eternity. They have the same mystical vein, alongside of similar precepts of self-forgetfulness, abnegation, and the waiving of desire, the same confidence in the power of the spirit to defy or disdain vicissitudes—ideas which brought both in touch with the ethical side of Christianity;—but their tempers and manner are as far as possible apart. Carlyle speaks of no one with more admiration than of Dante, recognising in the Italian his own intensity of love and hate and his own tenacity; but beyond this there is little evidence of the "Divina Commedia" having seriously attuned his thought: nor does he seem to have been much affected by any of the elder English poets. He scarcely refers to Chaucer; he alludes to Spenser here and there with some homage, but hardly ever, excepting Shakespeare, to the Elizabethan dramatists.

Among writers of the seventeenth century, he may have found in Hobbes some support of his advocacy of a strong government; but his views on this theme came rather from

a study of the history of that age. Milton he appreciates inadequately. To Dryden and Swift he is just; the latter, whether consciously to Carlyle or not, was in some respects his English master, and the points of resemblance in their characters suggest detailed examination. Their styles are utterly opposed, that of the one resting almost wholly on its Saxon base, that of the other being a coat of many colours; but both are, in the front rank of masters of prose-satire, inspired by the same audacity of "noble rage." Swift's humour has a subtler touch and yet more scathing scorn; his contempt of mankind was more real; his pathos equally genuine but more withdrawn; and if a worse foe he was a better friend. The comparisons already made between Johnson and Carlyle have exhausted the theme; they remain associated by their similar struggle and final victory, and sometimes by their tyrannous use of power; they are dissociated by the divergence of their intellectual and in some respects even their moral natures; both were forces of character rather than discoverers, both rulers of debate; but the one was of sense, the other of imagination, "all compact." The one blew "the blast of doom" of the old patronage; the other, against heavier odds, contended against the later tyranny of uninformed and insolent popular opinion. Carlyle did not escape wholly from the influence of the most infectious, if the most morbid, of French writers, J. J. Rousseau. They are alike in setting Emotion over Reason: in referring to the Past as a model; in subordinating mere criticism to ethical, religious or irreligious purpose; in being avowed propagandists; in their "deep unrest"; and in the diverse conclusions that have been drawn from their teaching.

Carlyle's enthusiasm for the leaders of the new German literature was, in some measure, inspired by the pride in a treasure-trove, the regard of a foster-father or *chaperon* who

first substantially took it by the hand and introduced it to English society: but it was also due to the feeling that he had found in it the fullest expression of his own perplexities, and at least their partial solution. His choice of its representatives is easily explained. In Schiller he found intellectually a younger brother, who had fought a part of his own fight and was animated by his own aspirations; in dealing with his career and works there is a shade of patronage. Goethe, on the other hand, he recognised across many divergencies as his master. The attachment of the belated Scotch Puritan to the greater German has provoked endless comment; but the former has himself solved the riddle. The contrasts between the teacher and pupil remain, but they have been exaggerated by those who only knew Goethe as one who had attained, and ignored the struggle of his hot youth on the way to attainment. Carlyle justly commends him, not alone for his artistic mastery, but for his sense of the reality and earnestness of life, which lifts him to a higher grade among the rulers of human thought than such more perfect artists and more passionate lyrists as Heine. He admires above all his conquest over the world, without concession to it, saying:—

> With him Anarchy has now become Peace . . . the once perturbed spirit is serene and rich in good fruits. . . . Neither, which is most important of all, has this Peace been attained by a surrender to Necessity, or any compact with Delusion—a seeming blessing, such as years and dispiritment will of themselves bring to most men, and which is indeed no blessing, since ever-continued battle is better than captivity. Many gird on the harness, few bear it warrior-like, still fewer put it off with triumph. Euphorion still asserts, "To die in strife is the end of life."

Goethe only ceased to fight when he had won; his want of sympathy with the so-called Apostles of Freedom, the stump orators of his day, was genuine and shared by

Carlyle. In the apologue of the *Three Reverences* in *Meister* the master indulges in humanitarian rhapsody and, unlike his pupil, verges on sentimental paradox, declaring through the lips of the Chief in that imaginary pedagogic province —which here and there closely recalls the *New Atlantis*— that we must recognise "humility and poverty, mockery and despite, disgrace and suffering, as divine—nay, even on sin and crime to look not as hindrances, but to honour them, as furtherances of what is holy." In answer to Emerson's Puritanic criticisms Carlyle replies :—

> Believe me, it is impossible you can be more a Puritan than I ; nay, I often feel as if I were far too much so, but John Knox himself, could he have seen the peaceable impregnable *fidelity* of that man's mind, and how to him also Duty was infinite,—Knox would have passed on wondering, not reproaching. But I will tell you in a word why I like Goethe. His is the only *healthy* mind, of any extent, that I have discovered in Europe for long generations ; it was he who first convincingly proclaimed to me . . . "Behold even in this scandalous Sceptico-Epicurean generation, when all is gone but hunger and cant, it is still possible that man be a man." And then as to that dark ground on which you love to see genius paint itself : consider whether misery is not ill health too, also whether good fortune is not worse to bear than bad, and on the whole whether the glorious serene summer is not greater than the wildest hurricane—as Light, the naturalists say, is stronger than Lightning.

Among German so-called mystics the one most nearly in accord with Carlyle was Novalis, who has left a sheaf of sayings—as "There is but one temple in the universe, and that is the body of man," "Who touches a human hand touches God"—that especially commended themselves to his commentator. Among philosophers proper, Fichte, in his assertion of the Will as a greater factor of human life and a nearer indication of personality than pure Thought, was Carlyle's nearest tutor. The *Vocation of the Scholar* and *The Way to a Blessed Life* anticipated and probably suggested

much of the more speculative part of *Sartor*. But to show their relation would involve a course of Metaphysics.

We accept Carlyle's statement that he learnt most of the secret of life and its aims from his master Goethe: but the closest of his kin, the man with whom he shook hands more nearly as an equal, was Richter—*Jean Paul der einzige*, lord of the empire of the air, yet with feet firmly planted on German earth, a colossus of reading and industry, the quaintest of humorists, not excepting either Sir Thomas Browne or Laurence Sterne, a lover and painter of Nature unsurpassed in prose. He first seems to have influenced his translator's style, and set to him the mode of queer titles and contortions, fantastic imaginary incidents, and endless digressions. His Ezekiel visions as the dream in the first *Flower Piece* from the life of Siebenkäs, and that on *New Year's Eve*, are like pre-visions of *Sartor*, and we find in the fantasies of both authors much of the same machinery. It has been asserted that whole pages of *Schmelzle's Journey to Flätz* might pass current for Carlyle's own; and it is evident that the latter was saturated with *Quintus Fixlein*. The following can hardly be a mere coincidence. Richter writes of a dead brother, "For he chanced to leap on an ice-board that had jammed itself among several others; but these recoiled, and his shot forth with him, melted away as it floated under his feet, and so sank his heart of fire amid the ice and waves"; while in *Cui Bono* we have—

> What is life? a thawing ice-board
> On a sea with sunny shore.

Similarly, the eloquently pathetic close of *Fixlein*, especially the passage, "Then began the Æolian harp of Creation," recalls the deepest pathos of *Sartor*. The two writers, it has been observed, had in common "reverence, humour,

vehemence, tenderness, gorgeousness, grotesqueness, and pure conduct of life." Much of Carlyle's article in the *Foreign Quarterly* of 1830 might be taken for a criticism of himself.

Enough has been said of the limits of Carlyle's magnanimity in estimating his English contemporaries; but the deliberate judgments of his essays were often more genial than those of his letters and conversation; and perhaps his overestimate of inferiors, whom in later days he drew round him as the sun draws the mist, was more hurtful than his severity; it is good for no man to live with satellites. His practical severance from Mazzini was mainly a personal loss: the widening of the gulf between him and Mill was a public calamity, for seldom have two men been better qualified the one to correct the excesses of the other. Carlyle was the greater genius; but the question which was the greater mind must be decided by the conflict between logic and emotion. They were related proximately as Plato to Aristotle, the one saw what the other missed, and their hold on the future has been divided. Mill had "the dry light," and his meaning is always clear; he is occasionally open to the charge of being a formalist, allowing too little for the "infusion of the affections," save when touched, as Carlyle was, by a personal loss; yet the critical range indicated by his essay on "Coleridge" on the one side, that on "Bentham" on the other, is as wide as that of his friend; and while neither said anything base, Mill alone is clear from the charge of having ever said anything absurd. His influence, though more indirect, may prove, save artistically, more lasting. The two teachers, in their assaults on *laissez faire*, curiously combine in giving sometimes undesigned support to social movements with which the elder at least had no sympathy.

Carlyle's best, because his most independent, friend

lived beyond the sea. He has been almost to weariness compared with Emerson, initial pupil later ally, but their contrasts are more instructive than their resemblances. They have both at heart a revolutionary spirit, marked originality, uncompromising aversion to illusions, disdain of traditional methods of thought and stereotyped modes of expression; but in Carlyle this is tempered by greater veneration for the past, in which he holds out models for our imitation; while Emerson sees in it only finger-posts for the future, and exhorts his readers to stay at home lest they should wander from themselves. The one loves detail, hates abstraction, delights to dwell on the minutiæ of biography, and waxes eloquent even on dates. The other, a brilliant though not always a profound generaliser, tells us that we must "leave a too close and lingering adherence to facts, and study the sentiment as it appeared in hope not in history . . . with the ideal is the rose of joy. But grief cleaves to names and persons, and the partial interests of to-day and yesterday." The one is bent under a burden, and pores over the riddle of the earth, till, when he looks up at the firmament of the unanswering stars, he can but exclaim, "It is a sad sight." The other is blown upon by the fresh breezes of the new world; his vision ranges over her clear horizons, and he leaps up elastic under her light atmosphere, exclaiming, "Give me health and a day and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous." Carlyle is a half-Germanised Scotchman, living near the roar of the metropolis, with thoughts of Weimar and reminiscences of the Covenanting hills. Emerson studies Swedenborg and reads the *Phædo* in his garden, far enough from the din of cities to enable him in calm weather to forget them. "Boston, London, are as fugitive as any whiff of smoke; so is society, so is the world." The one is strong

where the other is weak. Carlyle keeps his abode in the murk of clouds illumined by bolts of fire; he has never seen the sun unveiled. Emerson's "Threnody" shows that he has known the shadow; but he has fought with no Apollyons, reached the Celestial City without crossing the dark river, and won the immortal garland "without the dust and heat." Self-sacrifice, inconsistently maintained, is the watchword of the one: self-reliance, more consistently, of the other. The art of the two writers is in strong contrast. The charm of Emerson's style is its precision; his sentences are like medals each hung on its own string; the fields of his thought are combed rather than ploughed: he draws outlines, as Flaxman, clear and colourless. Carlyle's paragraphs are like streams from Pactolus, that roll nuggets from their source on their turbid way. His expressions are often grotesque, but rarely offensive. Both writers are essentially ascetic,—though the one swallows Mirabeau, and the other says that Jane Eyre should have accepted Rochester and "left the world in a minority." But Emerson is never coarse, which Carlyle occasionally is; and Carlyle is never flippant, as Emerson often is. In condemning the hurry and noise of mobs the American keeps his temper, and insists on justice without vindictiveness: wars and revolutions take nothing from his tranquillity, and he sets Hafiz and Shakespeare against Luther and Knox. Careless of formal consistency—"the hobgoblin of little minds"—he balances his aristocratic reserve with a belief in democracy, in progression by antagonism, and in collective wisdom as a limit to collective folly. Leaving his intellectual throne as the spokesman of a practical liberty, Emerson's wisdom was justified by the fact that he was always at first on the unpopular, and ultimately on the winning, side. Casting his vote for the diffusion of popular literature, a wide suffrage,

a mild penal code,[1] he yet endorsed the saying of an old American author, "A monarchy is a merchantman which sails well but will sometimes strike on a rock and go to the bottom; whilst a republic is a raft that will never sink, but then your feet are always in water." Maintaining that the State exists for its members, he holds that the enervating influences of authority are least powerful in popular governments, and that the tyranny of a public opinion not enforced by law need only be endured by voluntary slaves. Emerson confides in great men, "to educate whom the State exists"; but he regards them as inspired mouthpieces rather than controlling forces: their prime mission is to "fortify our hopes," their indirect services are their best. The career of a great man should rouse us to a like assertion of ourselves. We ought not to obey, but to follow, sometimes by not obeying, him. "It is the imbecility not the wisdom of men that is always inviting the impudence of power."

It is obvious that many of these views are in essential opposition to the teaching of Carlyle; and it is remarkable that two conspicuous men so differing and expressing their differences with perfect candour should have lived so long on such good terms. Their correspondence, ranging over thirty-eight years (begun in 1834, after Emerson's visit to Craigenputtock, and ending in 1872, before his final trip to England), is on the whole one of the most edifying in literary history. The fundamental accord, unshaken by the ruffle of the visit in 1847, is a testimony to the fact that the common preservation of high sentiments amid

[1] Carlyle, on the other hand, holds "that," as has been said, "we are entitled to deal with criminals as relics of barbarism in the midst of civilisation." His protest, though exaggerated, against leniency in dealing with atrocities, emphatically requisite in an age apt to ignore the rigour of justice, has been so far salutary, and may be more so.

the irksome discharge of ordinary duties may survive and override the most distinct antagonisms of opinion. Matthew Arnold has gone so far as to say that he "would not wonder if Carlyle lived in the long run by such an invaluable record as that correspondence between him and Emerson and not by his works." This is paradoxical; but the volumes containing it are in some respects more interesting than the letters of Goethe and Schiller, as being records of "two noble kinsmen" of nearer intellectual claims. The practical part of the relationship on the part of Emerson is very beautiful; he is the more unselfish, and on the whole appears the better man, especially in the almost unlimited tolerance that passes with a smile even such violences as the "Ilias in nuce"; but Carlyle shows himself to be the stronger. Their mutual criticisms were of real benefit. Emerson succeeded in convincing his friend that so-called anarchy might be more effective in subduing the wilderness than any despotism; while the advice to descend from "Himalaya peaks and indigo skies" to concrete life is accepted and adopted in the later works of the American, *Society and Solitude* and the *Conduct of Life*, which Carlyle praises without stint. Keeping their poles apart they often meet half-way; and in matters of style as well as judgment tinge and tend to be transfused into one another, so that in some pages we have to look to the signature to be sure of the writer. Towards the close of the correspondence Carlyle in this instance admits his debt.

> I do not know another man in all the world to whom I can speak with clear hope of getting adequate response from him. Truly Concord seems worthy of the name: no dissonance comes to me from that side. Ah me! I feel as if in the wide world there were still but this one voice that responded intelligently to my own: as if the rest were all hearsays . . . echoes: as if this alone were true and alive. My blessings on you, good Ralph Waldo.

Emerson answers in 1872, on receipt of the completed edition of his friend's work: "You shall wear the crown at the Pan-Saxon games, with no competitor in sight . . . well earned by genius and exhaustive labour, and with nations for your pupils and praisers."

The general verdict on Carlyle's literary career assigns to him the first place among the authors of his time. No writer of our generation, in or out of England, has combined such abundance with such power. Regarding his rank as a writer there is little or no dispute: it is admitted that the irregularities and eccentricities of his style are bound up with its richness. In estimating the value of his thought we must distinguish between instruction and inspiration. If we ask what new truths he has taught, what problems he has definitely solved, our answers must be few. This is a perhaps inevitable result of the manner of his writing, or rather of the nature of his mind. Aside from political parties, he helped to check their exaggerations by his own; seeing deeply into the under-current evils of the time, even when vague in his remedies he was of use in his protest against leaving these evils to adjust themselves—what has been called "the policy of drifting"—or of dealing with them only by catchwords. No one set a more incisive brand on the meanness that often marks the unrestrained competition of great cities; no one was more effective in his insistence that the mere accumulation of wealth may mean the ruin of true prosperity; no one has assailed with such force the mammon-worship and the frivolity of his age. Everything he writes comes home to the individual conscience: his claim to be regarded as a moral exemplar has been diminished, his hold on us as an ethical teacher remains unrelaxed. It has been justly observed that he helped to modify "the thought rather than the opinion of two generations." His message, as

that of Emerson, was that "life must be pitched on a higher plane." Goethe said to Eckermann in 1827 that Carlyle was a moral force so great that he could not tell what he might produce. His influence has been, though not continuously progressive, more marked than that of any of his compeers, among whom he was, if not the greatest, certainly the most imposing personality. It had two culminations; shortly after the appearance of *The French Revolution*, and again towards the close of the seventh decade of the author's life. To the enthusiastic reception of his works in the Universities, Mr. Froude has borne eloquent testimony, and the more academically restrained Arnold admits that "the voice of Carlyle, overstrained and misused since, sounded then in Oxford fresh and comparatively sound," though, he adds, "The friends of one's youth cannot always support a return to them." In the striking article in the *St. James' Gazette* of the date of the great author's death we read: "One who had seen much of the world and knew a large proportion of the remarkable men of the last thirty years declared that Mr. Carlyle was by far the most impressive person he had ever known, the man who conveyed most forcibly to those who approached him [best on resistance principles] that general impression of genius and force of character which it is impossible either to mistake or to define." Thackeray, as well as Ruskin and Froude, acknowledged him as, beyond the range of his own *métier*, his master, and the American Lowell, penitent for past disparagement, confesses that "all modern Literature has felt his influence in the right direction"; while the Emersonian hermit Thoreau, a man of more intense though more restricted genius than the poet politician, declares—"Carlyle alone with his wide humanity has, since Coleridge, kept to us the promise of England. His wisdom provokes rather than informs. He blows down narrow walls, and struggles, in a

lurid light, like the Jöthuns, to throw the old woman Time; in his work there is too much of the anvil and the forge, not enough hay-making under the sun. He makes us act rather than think: he does not say, know thyself, which is impossible, but know thy work. He has no pillars of Hercules, no clear goal, but an endless Atlantic horizon. He exaggerates. Yes; but he makes the hour great, the picture bright, the reverence and admiration strong; while mere precise fact is a coil of lead." Our leading journal on the morning after Carlyle's death wrote of him in a tone of well-tempered appreciation: "We have had no such individuality since Johnson. Whether men agreed or not, he was a touchstone to which truth and falsehood were brought to be tried. A preacher of Doric thought, always in his pulpit and audible, he denounced wealth without sympathy, equality without respect, mobs without leaders, and life without aim." To this we may add the testimony of another high authority in English letters, politically at the opposite pole: "Carlyle's influence in kindling enthusiasm for virtues worthy of it, and in stirring a sense of the reality on the one hand and the unreality on the other, of all that men can do and suffer, has not been surpassed by any teacher now living. Whatever later teachers may have done in definitely shaping opinion . . . here is the friendly fire-bearer who first conveyed the Promethean spark; here the prophet who first smote the rock." Carlyle, writes one of his oldest friends, "may be likened to a fugleman; he stood up in the front of Life's Battle and showed in word and action his notion of the proper attitude and action of men. He was, in truth, a prophet, and he has left his gospels." To those who contest that these gospels are for the most part negative, we may reply that to be taught what not to do is to be far advanced on the way to do.

In nothing is the generation after him so prone to be unjust to a fresh thinker as with regard to his originality. A physical discovery, as Newton's, remains to ninety-nine out of a hundred a mental miracle; but a great moral teacher "labours to make himself forgotten." When he begins to speak he is suspected of insanity; when he has won his way he receives a Royal Commission to appoint the judges; as a veteran he is shelved for platitude. So Horace is regarded as a mere jewelry store of the Latin, Bacon, in his *Essays*, of the English, wisdom, which they each in fact helped to create. Carlyle's paradoxes have been exaggerated, his partialities intensified in his followers; his critical readers, not his disciples, have learnt most from him; he has helped across the Slough of Despond only those who have also helped themselves. When all is said of his dogmatism, his petulance, his "evil behaviour," he remains the master spirit of his time, its Censor, as Macaulay is its Panegyrist, and Tennyson its Mirror. He has saturated his nation with a wholesome tonic, and the practice of any one of his precepts for the conduct of life is ennobling. More intense than Wordsworth, more intelligible than Browning, more fervid than Mill, he has indicated the pitfalls in our civilisation. His works have done much to mould the best thinkers in two continents, in both of which he has been the Greatheart to many pilgrims. Not a few could speak in the words of the friend whose memory he has so affectionately preserved, "Towards me it is still more true than towards England that no one has been and done like you." A champion of ancient virtue, he appeared in his own phrase applied to Fichte, as "a Cato Major among degenerate men." Carlyle had more than the shortcomings of a Cato; he had all the inconsistent vehemence of an imperfectly balanced mind; but he had a far wider range and deeper sympathies. The message of the

modern preacher transcended all mere applications of the text *delenda est.* He denounced, but at the same time nobly exhorted, his age. A storm-tossed spirit, "tempest-buffeted," he was "citadel-crowned" in his unflinching purpose and the might of an invincible will.